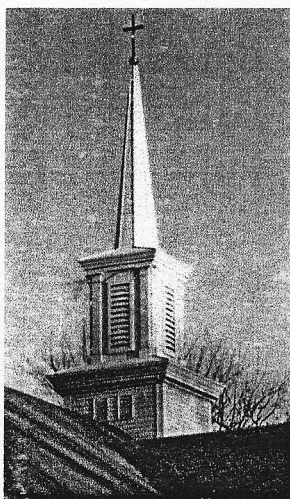


First Parish  
United Church of Christ  
(Congregational)  
**1729-2004**



Somersworth New Hampshire

A reprint of the 250th Anniversary Booklet  
with additional history from 1979-2004.

A community of faith  
celebrating 275 years.

This publication contains a reprint of the  
250th Anniversary Booklet,  
Summersworth Parish Church 1729-1979  
written by  
Irene Wentworth Wight and  
Rev. John Edward Nelson.

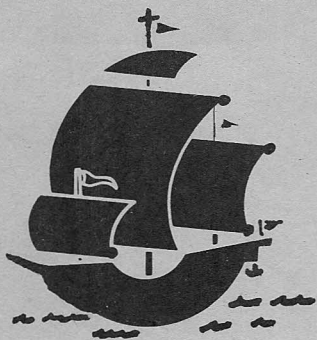
Within the first 119 pages, you will  
find the detailed history  
of the early roots of what is now  
First Parish United Church of Christ  
(Congregational).

On pages 121-143,  
our recent history is re-lived  
with pictures and highlights  
from the last 25 years.  
Much transpired in the life of the church  
from 1979-2004 and many of those  
memories are included herein.

*May this community of faith called  
First Parish continue as a beacon of hope.*

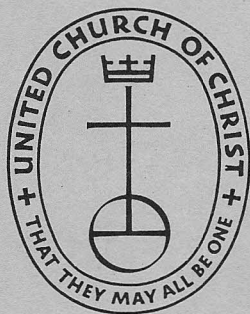
FIRST PARISH  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
176 WEST HIGH STREET  
P.O. BOX 228  
SOMERSWORTH, NH 03878-0228





# Summersworth Parish Church

1729 - 1979



# Summersworth Parish Church

1729 - 1979

IRENE WENTWORTH WIGHT

JOHN EDWARD NELSON

Summer Session 1929-1930

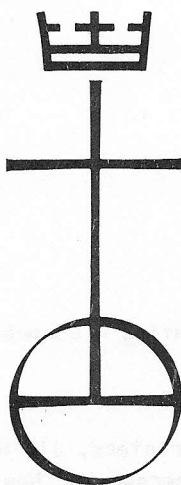
1929 - 1930

IRVING WENTWORTH WRIGHT

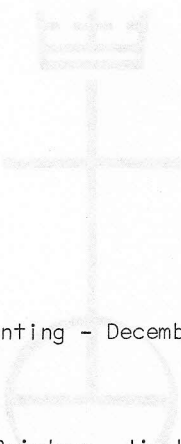
JOHN EDWARD NELSON

Dedicated to those who have contributed to the  
life of the First Parish Church of Summersworth:

"Well done, good and faithful servant...."



Dedicated to those who have contributed to the  
Life of the First Parish Church of Somersworth  
"Well done, good and faithful servant..."



First Printing - December 1979

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# Foreword

## NEW ENGLAND SABBATH

Remote and dim the cloud-bank clings  
Unto the mountain range that rings  
And makes these coasts a land apart.  
But Bersom Hill holds humble things.  
It knows the song life's autumn sings  
In silent Sabbaths of the heart.

Here linger tokens of a day  
Whose hour was noon, whose month was May.  
Before the far-off bell had tolled  
That laid Victorian pride away.  
Before our fathers thought to say  
That Bersom Hill was growing old.

Time has no choice but to retard  
The sunlight fading from the yard  
The shadows creeping slow and chill  
Along the pathways and the sward  
Of quiet mansions keeping guard  
Against the night on Bersom Hill.

Time, with his face half turned away  
Grants brief reprieve to yesterday:  
The stream flows past the silent mill  
The day grows late, as days must do;  
And now with slur inept but sweet  
Is heard along each drowsy street  
That wanders over Bersom Hill  
The pigeon's inconclusive coo.

Not every town can pause and know  
At once the new and long ago  
As can the folk on Bersom Hill  
Whose river, when the sun is low  
Bears vanished decades in its flow  
And Sabbaths dear and dead and still.

Dr. Donald C. Babcock

(Bersom is Berwick-Somersworth)

Dr. Donald C. Babcock was the Methodist minister in Somersworth 1914-1917 in the building presently occupied by the First Parish Church. Subsequently, he became a Professor of History at the University of New Hampshire, and chairman of the History Department; later Professor of Philosophy, for whom the Babcock Chair of Philosophy was named; Babcock House was dedicated in his honor; in 1960, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. An outstanding poet, his poetry has been published in leading American magazines, also in collections notably "New England Harvest", "For Those I Taught" and "So In The Heart".

"And now upon this church which has been a tower of strength and a source of usefulness throughout the years of its history, we invoke heaven's richest blessings and the renewed affections of all of its children. May it be permitted us to carry forward that which has been bequeathed us to larger success and more glorious results. Blessed shall we be, if they who are gathered here one hundred years from now shall be able to say of us "They were faithful to their trust".

Rev. M. Stephen Webb

(Excerpt from an Historical Sermon preached in Somersworth July 14, 1876)

## Preface

The English speaking peoples in America from whom many of us originated brought to this new land the idea of limited government. More than seven centuries ago, it all began with the Magna Carta, continued through conflict between Parliament and the Stuart Kings, the Puritan Revolution of 1640, the English Bill of Rights 1688, the American Revolution and was made manifest in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

This self-same spirit of democracy has been outstanding in Congregational Churches and continues today in the affiliation with the United Church of Christ. It follows that although the weakness of democracy is inherent in Congregationalism, so is its strength.

This history makes apparent that dissenters have had their day in court, a time consuming and sometimes inefficient way of getting things done. From time to time, antagonisms have inevitably arisen that no voice of authority could silence; yet, in the end, and more often than not, Christian principles prevailed. That the First Parish Church continued its mission begun two hundred and fifty years ago bears witness to this truth.

Therefore, the most pressing problem is age old. It is that of securing efficiency without sacrificing democratic liberty. As in all democratic bodies, union for strategic advance comes about only through great effort.

Furthermore, the image of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants or "Wasps" as is created in many minds, is that of a people who are emotionally uptight, self-righteous, narrow-minded, inhibited, stingy, perhaps, and compulsively committed to the work ethic.

They are rapidly becoming a minority even though big business is still dominated by certain descendants of the first settlers. There are, nevertheless, uprisings, philosophic and economic, within certain industries, and organized pressure groups that are foreboding of things to come.

Our most precious heritage from these, our progenitors, are gifts that time, hopefully, will never take away. From them came not only the idea of limited government, that there are things no king, president, or other official is allowed to do, but also the goodly heritage of freedom of conscience.

It is those who have a conscience, who think enough to be willing to sacrifice something for conscience, that are the most valuable citizens in any republic, indeed, in any society.

So, with pride in our past, may we remember also our failures and attempt to rectify them. May we no longer, as Anglo-Saxon people impose unlimited government on others. May we extend the concept of "toleration" to a reaching out and a slow forging of bonds of love toward all the human race.

Dr. Henry Steel Commager in a television broadcast June 3, 1975 said: "The great tradition, then, of America, and a tradition which accounts in large part, I think, for the progress that America has made is that we have been a refuge and a beacon light to the peoples of all nations. We've encouraged not only individual freedom, but the expression of that freedom, not only private religion but public religion.

We encourage enterprise in every conceivable arena, and only as long as we do that can we hope to continue along the lines laid down with such enormous wisdom by the founding fathers, and to continue along the lines developed by the American people generation after generation, who have thought it important to express their innermost convictions in public fashion. And out of that expression of conviction, of religious conviction and moral conviction, out of that has come the republic we are."

To our forefathers we dedicate this portion of their brave history. For all they gave to the Parish of Summersworth may their memory be revered.

## ROLL OF MINISTERS

Olde Parish Church, Congregational  
of Summersworth, gathered in 1729-30

James Pike, 1730 - 1790

Pearson Thurston, 1792 - 1812

Luke A. Spofford, 1817

Rev. Mr. Blodgett

Reuben Porter, 1824 -

First Congregational Church  
of Great Falls (Somersworth)  
organized January 16, 1827

Reuben Porter (stated supply) Jan. 1827 - Dec. 1827

Josiah T. Hawes, Jan. 1828 - Nov. 1829

William Twining (acting pastor) Jan. 1830 - March 1832

James A. Smith, April 1832 - July 1837

Alfred Goldsmith, Sept. 1837 - Aug. 1838

John R. Adams (acting pastor) Sept. 1838 - Dec. 1840

Samuel Beane, July 1841 - May 1844

James McCollom, Oct. 1844 - Dec. 1853

James B. Thornton (acting pastor) April 1854 - Oct. 1855

George N. Anthony, Oct. 1855 - Sept. 1860

Horatio Q. Butterfield, May 1861 - Jan. 1865

Ephraim N. Hidden, Jan. 1865 - April 1870

Clark Carter, April 1870 - June 1872

Stephen W. Webb, Jan. 1873 - Dec. 1881

Samuel Bell (acting pastor) Sept. 1882 - Dec. 1884

John M. Dutton, June 1885 - Dec. 1891

Howard W. Pope, Sept. 1892 - April 1894

Henry Hyde, Oct. 1894 - July 1905

Albert C. Fulton, Dec. 1905 - Jan. 1910

Asa M. Parker, April 1910 - Oct. 1913

Frank G. Woodworth, Sept. 1914 - July 1926

James H. Potter, Nov. 1926 - Sept. 1929

Oviatt E. Desmond, Sept. 1929 - Oct. 1930

Federated Church

Congregational-Methodist

Richard Kellog, Sept. 1930 - 1933

J.T.C. Blackmore, Dec. 1933 - 1937

Arthur Snow, 1937 -

First Parish Church, Congregational  
Organized in 1938

Arthur Snow, Aug. 1942

Theodore Hadley, Dec. 1942 - Nov. 1947

Charles L. Pendleton, Jan. 1948 - Nov. 1950

John H. Olsen, April 1951 - Feb. 1953

Austin W. Guild, July 1953 - March 1956

John E. Nelson, Oct. 1956

United Church of Christ  
April 9, 1961

John E. Nelson



# LIST OF MINISTERS

Old First Church, Congregational  
of Sumnerworth, gathered in 1729-30

James Ellis, 1729 - 1730  
 Emerson Thurston, 1731 - 1812  
 John A. Bockland, 1813  
 Rev. Mr. Bockland  
 Parker Parker, 1824 -  
 First Congregational Church  
 of West Falls (Sumnerworth)  
 Organized January 15, 1827  
 Parker Parker (lasted supply) Jan. 1827 - Dec. 1827  
 Josiah T. Howard, Jan. 1828 - Nov. 1828  
 William Wells (acting pastor) Jan. 1828 - March 1828  
 James A. Latta, April 1828 - July 1828  
 Alfred Colburn, Sept. 1828 - Aug. 1828  
 John F. Adams (acting pastor) Sept. 1828 - Dec. 1828  
 Samuel Adams, July 1829 - May 1829  
 James D. Colton, Oct. 1829 - Dec. 1829  
 James B. Thurston (acting pastor) April 1830 - Oct. 1830  
 George N. Anthony, Oct. 1830 - Dec. 1830  
 Martin D. Butterfield, Jan. 1831 - Jan. 1831  
 Ephraim N. Hibdon, Jan. 1831 - April 1831  
 Clark Carter, April 1831 - June 1831  
 Stephen W. Webb, Jan. 1832 - Dec. 1832  
 Samuel Bell (acting pastor) Dec. 1832 - Dec. 1832  
 John M. Dutton, Jan. 1833 - Dec. 1833  
 Edward M. Pope, Sept. 1834 - April 1834  
 Henry Hyde, Oct. 1834 - July 1834  
 Albert C. Fulton, Sept. 1834 - Jan. 1834  
 Mrs. M. Parker, April 1835 - Oct. 1835  
 James B. Woodbury, Sept. 1835 - July 1835  
 James B. Parker, Nov. 1835 - Sept. 1835  
 Orest E. Johnson, Sept. 1835 - Oct. 1835  
 Congregational Church  
 Organized in 1835  
 Richard Kellogg, Sept. 1835 - 1835  
 J. T. Blackman, Nov. 1835 - 1835  
 Arthur Snow, 1837 -  
 First Parish Church, Congregational  
 Organized in 1838  
 Arthur Snow, Aug. 1838  
 Theodore Holley, Nov. 1838 - Nov. 1838  
 Charles L. Peniston, Jan. 1838 - Jan. 1838  
 John H. Olsen, Sept. 1838 - Feb. 1838  
 Austin W. Bullis, July 1838 - March 1838  
 John E. Nelson, Oct. 1838  
 United Church of Christ  
 April 9, 1838  
 John E. Nelson

# Chapter I

## CONGREGATIONALISM AND OUR HERITAGE OF FREEDOM

# Chapter I

CONGREGATIONALISM

AND

OUR HERITAGE OF FREEDOM

In the early days of our country's history, the Pilgrim Fathers came to this abundant yet resistant land with the hope that their children and their children's children could exercise freedom of conscience and the right to believe as they would. For these rights they were willing to suffer and endure or perhaps to die. From them came a goodly heritage.

This band of believers had been members of John Robinson's congregation in Holland, having originally come from Scrooby, England, where they were then known not as Pilgrims but as the Scrooby Separatists. Their belief was that they should separate entirely from the Church of England. In England church and state were one and separation was tantamount to rebellion.

No longer safe in their native land, they emigrated to the Low Countries, the one spot in Europe allowing for the greatest degree of religious toleration. Although they found the religious freedom that they sought, there came a time when they were confronted with other problems. Their children were losing touch with England, forgetting the English language and English ways, and for this reason the Pilgrims sailed over perilous seas to make a special mark on this continent.

Not all of them, however, were truth-seekers nor concerned with religious liberty. In order to finance the voyage to America, the congregation joined with others, some of whom came for self-serving purposes. Among the group also were indentured servants prepared to labor for seven years for the right to be independent at last.

The little band who arrived off Cape Cod in November in an inhospitable time and place suffered greatly. As is well known, half the first colony failed to survive, yet the strongest and most resourceful among them set up a church and a form of government known as the Mayflower Compact, the first written constitution in the new world.

The Mayflower Compact was, in a sense, not much more in substance than an agreement to agree. Yet beyond that it was an exercise in liberty, far from the authority of England:

"By these presents, we do solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation."

The association and agreement known in history as the Mayflower Compact, although directed to "the body politick" rather than the church congregation, was drawn up like one of the church covenants with which the Pilgrims were familiar.

Within a few years the Massachusetts Bay Colony was also established. Here, too, there were reproduced the type of government and ways of society the Colonists had known in England. These colonists under John Winthrop, were called Puritans, and like the Pilgrims had left England for the deepest of personal reasons, principally, freedom of worship. In the Puritan group, too, Congregationalists were included, for the Congregational Way was practiced by many of the Puritans in England.

The term "Congregational" had come into use about the beginning of the great Civil War in England, and in New England was descriptive of a form of church organization in which the congregation is the source of ecclesiastical government. This group was also called "Separatists" because of their withdrawal from The English establishment.

Early Congregationalism was a by-product of the Reformation; its primary devotion was to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. The belief was that if the Scriptures teach fully all that is requisite for men to know and believe and all duties of the Christian life, then they must also contain an authoritative and complete guide as to the nature, organization and administration of the Christian Church. Thus, the conviction that the Bible contains such a pattern gave rise to the Congregational movement.

It should, in fairness, be remembered, however, that not all who sought religious freedom for themselves were willing to grant the same privilege to others. The Pilgrims on the whole were tolerant and lived quietly and peacefully on Cape Cod. The Massachusetts Bay colonists were more emphatic and virile in their religious beliefs, and far more inclined to have their own way when it came to a matter of religious services. Those who did not approve of the Puritan way of life could go elsewhere; hence, there came about sojourns to Narragansett Bay and Connecticut by dissenters and non-conformists. Notable among

the group was Roger Williams who held "dangerous opinions" for which he was expelled from the colony. His chief error, so-called, was that he liked and defended Indians.

He even wrote a treatise denouncing King James for giving away land belonging to them. Warned by friends that he would be deported to England for punishment, through a long and bitter winter he walked overland and could not have survived without the help of the Indians. He and a band of his followers set up a new commonwealth in the Narragansett Plantations, later to be known as Rhode Island, where complete religious freedom was allowed.

There were imperfections in the religious freedom concept brought here by the first Congregationalists in New England. The Quakers were from time to time persecuted, and in March 1638 Anne Hutchinson was excommunicated and cast out later to be killed by Indians, and her five children as well; nevertheless, the ideal of religious toleration still remained in the hearts of the more enlightened. Although in 1659 Mary Dyer, William Robinson and Marmaduke Stephenson were all marched to the gallows tree, on this New England soil, escape from persecution was still lying ahead as was freedom to believe what one would believe.

Again to quote Henry Steele Commager from the interview on NBC January 1975:

"At the time of the American Revolution every nation in the old world maintained an established church.

It is almost impossible for Americans of the present day to realize how portentous the establishment was, how powerful it was, how omiscient it was. The state determined the religion and imposed that religion upon most of its people.

To our forefathers freedom of religion was basic, after all, to the exercise of all other freedoms...it involved freedom of speech, for one had to speak about religion. It involved freedom of the press, for one wrote about religion. It involved freedom of assembly and freedom of petition. It involved all other freedoms."

It was this freedom of religion that men had fought for for centuries, this had precipitated war after war, this had set up the Inquisition which had driven the Huguenots out of France, which had done so many things, fortunate and unfortunate, Americans felt that without that freedom, no other freedoms counted. Without that freedom, the other freedoms could not, indeed be exercised.

As for its beliefs, the Congregational type of church organization with a long history of self-government has allowed each



congregation to make its own declaration of faith and to be free to decide its own form of worship. In the conduct of the local church each member has an equal voice. The minister serves at the call of the members, and is assisted in the discharge of his spiritual duties by deacons elected from among the members.

Rooted in the democratic principle, each congregation has at its head Jesus Christ alone, and the relations of various congregations are those of fellow members in a common family of God. Congregationalism eliminates bishops and presbyters in something of the same spirit that our forebears more than seven centuries ago asserted their rights with the Magna Carta and continued through the wrangles of Parliament and the Stuart Kings, the regime of Cromwell, and the Glorious Revolution, at the accession of William and Mary when Protestantism was re-established as a state religion. The spirit of freedom also took form in the English Bill of Rights 1688, the American Revolution and our own Bill of Rights and Constitution. Firmly established is the right to believe, closely allied to the idea of limited government, and the democratic ideal.

In America, meanwhile, the growth of Congregationalism steadily increased. In the twenty-eight years following the settlement of Plymouth (1620) thousands of colonists had come to New England, planted their settlements from Maine to Connecticut, penetrated the interior along the Connecticut River to Hartford, and had begun to send groups into what is now southern New Hampshire. In 1648 there were thirty-seven settlements of sufficient strength to set up churches.

Once having established itself in New England, Congregationalism may be said to have gone wherever New Englanders have gone, and to be strongest in the states where they settled. Indeed, for some years following the settlements Congregationalism became practically a state religion. Its principles, church government and discipline were chiefly based on the Cambridge Platform of 1648.

Congregationalism was also in the vanguard of education. In 1636, the Massachusetts General Court voted to give four hundred pounds toward the establishment of an academy which presently became Harvard College. Yale followed in 1701, some of its trustees being Congregational ministers. Many colleges later took form under Congregational initiative as the population advanced westward. The concept of religious freedom continued. Yale, Williams, Dartmouth, Amherst, Oberlin and many, many others have always been free from sectarianism.

Although ideals of religious toleration were given to our forefathers and achieved among the enlightened, their full realization is awaited even now.

Again to quote Dr. Commager:

"The mood of colonial times is captured in the words of an itinerant preacher. Meeting a minister of another denomination, he is reported, in an act of toleration, to have said, "Let us not quarrel with each other. We are, after all, serving the same God. You in your way -- and I in His."

The Congregational link to the Great Awakening, a spiritual renaissance that swept the colonies for thirty-five years before the Revolution should be strongly emphasized.

It all started with Jonathan Edwards, the leader of this movement, interested in all things scientific, intellectual and spiritual, he set for himself the colossal task of reinterpreting Calvinistic theology in terms of the psychological concepts of John Locke.

Inevitably, there were those who did not understand. Emotional and spiritual upheavals followed; a series of revivals swept the colonies led by groups who believed that God was being denied. Opposing were the Old Lights and the New Lights. The latter called Enthusiasts, believed themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit alone, and generally speaking, their ministers were anti-intellectual. In the struggle which the New Lights eventually lost, many turned against their own ministers, and often refused to have their children baptized. Thus churches, including those in New Hampshire, became separated and families divided.

In this area alone, the revivals were stimulated by great epidemics that were believed to be visitations of an angry God, and by Indian attacks. In 1735, 113 persons in New Hampshire died of diphtheria, of the 984 who died in 1736, 800 were under ten years of age. 91 died in Durham and 149 in Exeter. Although the records of our own church were destroyed, these happenings could not have failed to affect the mental, physical and spiritual health of all early colonists in this area. There were waves of pietism which were also stirred by winds of superstition and fear. Occurring in an age of blind faith and reason, few there were who could take a stand which included both.

Among other results of the movement was an outburst of missionary effort among the Indians. Eleazer Wheelock, founder of Dartmouth, was influenced thereby for Dartmouth was originally a school for Indians. It also served to build up interests that were inter-colonial in character; to increase opposition to the Anglican church, and royal officials who supported it and to encourage a democratic spirit in religion.

Far-reaching effects were the spreading of democratic concepts and the creation of a climate in which the revolution against tyranny could triumph.



## Chapter II

OLDE PARISHES -

THEIR COMMON PRACTICES OF WORSHIP

## Chapter II

THEIR COMMON PRACTICE OF WORSHIP  
- OLDE PARISHES -

Since the First Parish United Church of Christ (Congregational) was rooted in the concept of the parish, the question "What is a parish?" is pertinent.

The English colonists had brought with them two ideas, the town and the parish, the former to aid them in civil government, the latter to provide a method of religious worship. The term "parish" has existed for over a thousand years.

When the Puritans came from England to set up Congregational polity in New England at first as in England, the town and parish were identical in extent. As population increased, some areas were divided into one or more parishes. During the colonial period parishes built meeting houses, elected religious teachers and officials and supported their ministers who were a power in the community. These clergymen were often authorities in law and education as well as theology.

Early religious practices in colonial churches are of interest. Since some of the data are conflicting, it may be assumed that in those days as at the present time there was a variety of practices and customs.

Usually there was an opening prayer of Thanksgiving in words of the minister's own choosing. It was the custom for all to stand with hands raised high during the prayer as suggested by Paul in Timothy 1, 2:8. Since prayers tended to be extremely long, in certain cases, at least a degree of discomfort must have ensued. One minister wrote in his diary in 1727, "I was near an hour and a half in my first prayer."

Traditionally, at the reading of the Bible an entire chapter was included as a mark of respect for the Scripture. Furthermore, the congregation stood while the minister "gave out" the Biblical text for the sermon.



Psalms were sung, and a "singing deacon" would lead the congregation for in the colonial church there was no choir or anthem. In other words, the tunes and words were "lined out" preferably by a deacon with a "big and talking voice and courage to let it out."

Although hymns had been confined to rhymed portions of Scripture, in the first part of the 18th century there were stirrings of change. They came about through the influence of the English Congregational hymn writer, Rev. Isaac Watts (1674-1748) when this prejudice against hymns of human composition began to break down.

Previous to this period musical instruments other than pitch pipes were not commonly used, and organs had been referred to as the "devil's bagpipes".

The sermon lasted from two to four hours. The minister had an hour glass on the pulpit and the congregation tended to feel deprived if the minister didn't turn it at least once.

Following the sermon there was usually a second prayer and the Benediction.

A "tything man" was assigned to carefully inspect the behavior of all persons on the Sabbath Day, including absence from public worship and any rude or indecent behavior in the meeting. Sleeping or dozing must have been common during these long sermons; it called for a rap with his stick, a brass knocker at one end for the males, and a rabbit's foot or feather for the females. He was to watch over "youths of disorderly carriage" and see that they behaved themselves. Lay preaching and participation was a distinguishing characteristic of churches, many of which were founded without ordained clergy. This respect for "the priesthood of all believers" was much in evidence during the colonial period and to this day is an important part in the understanding of the church.

In the early days men could ask questions of the minister concerning the sermon. If extraordinarily moved, however, a woman could ask a man to present her question for her.

There were also such things as censures. These public admonitions could be shared by officers of the church including admonishments to the minister.

The offering was often at the very end of the service, people filing out past the deacon's seat near the communion table. Otherwise, it came earlier soon after the sermon had been given.

Pastoral prayers were "free form", often extemporaneous, never from printed forms. So uneasy were they about their Anglican-

Catholic history, that in early colonial days some churches frowning on formal prayers even disallowed the Lord's Prayer.

"Owning a covenant" was a very important part of early New England Congregationalism. It was not merely a formal agreement, but really formed a new society akin to a large family or as one Puritan put it "a little bundle of eternal life".

The Lord's Supper has been observed since the early days of Congregationalism. In their early history, however, Congregationalists shared to the full the Puritan objection to ceremonies and vestments which seemed to savor of Romanism. For the same reason, they objected to fixed forms of prayer. Only in recent years have Congregational ministers worn vestments.

In the first churches the officers were designated as "pastors, teachers, elders, deacons and helpers" though instances of "teacher" and "ruling elder" may be found in the 18th century and the early 19th most congregations had, before the close of the 17th century, reduced their officers to a pastor and several deacons, the principal officers of the Congregational church at the present time.

The support of the ministry was, from earliest times until within the 19th century, from public or general taxation. Our ancestors did not originate this method. The emigrants brought this system with them from England.

Although, the church in early America was, in a sense, as firmly established as was the Church of England in England, Mrs. Annie W. Baer, former Rollinsford historian, informs us that early churches in this area and elsewhere, although Protestant, were not strictly sectarian nor denominational until the early 18th century. The strongest drive for denominationalism continued through the Civil War period.

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ly established as was the church in England in England, Mr.  
John W. Bass, former Baptist minister, informs us that  
early churches in this state and elsewhere, although Protestant,  
were not strictly sects for denominational until the early  
18th century. The strongest drive for denominationalism com-  
menced during the Civil War period.

# **Chapter III**

**OLDE PARISH CHURCH  
OF  
SUMMERSWORTH - 1729**



In the year of 1675 beginnings had already been made in the way of planning for the settlement of what is now Rollinsford Junction, later to be the location of the Olde Parish Church from which the First Parish Church originated. In 1694 lots were laid out that were all within the present town of Rollinsford and designated for eight original settlers; also, at this time, a cartway was constructed which led to the future first meeting house.

For several years the inhabitants of Salmon Falls of the Sligo on the Newichawannock (now known as the Salmon Falls River) and the new settlement at what is now Rollinsford Junction had been obliged to travel from five to eight miles by water, by horse and cart to the church at Dover Neck to worship where a "Terret" had been built in 1665. In 1713 a meeting house was built on Pine Hill on the Cocheco; thus, the distance for some of the colonists was cut down somewhat. Even so, they still had to travel four miles in inclement weather and were in constant fear of Indian attacks.

In the midst of these distressing problems, there were stirrings of encouragement to the settlers to begin plans for their own parish - population increased; furthermore, the Act of 1714 authorized settlements "within the royal province to make choice of a minister, to agree with him what salary should be paid, and to raise money by taxation for the salaries of the ministers and expenses for the meeting house." It was under this act that the inhabitants of the Salmon Falls area of Dover were motivated to set themselves up as a separate and distinct parish.

In 1727 a congregation was gathered and a meeting held that led to the establishment of the first church in what was later, in 1729, to become the parish of Summersworth.

Prior to the building of a church, meetings were held in a barn during the summertime or at someone's home or out of doors. Reverend John Pike (no relation of James Pike who became its inimitable first parish minister) or one of his elders who served the First Church in Olde Dover, when leaving for services would say, "I am going to Summer Town to conduct services." The name Summersworth was suggested by Reverend Pike. It is derived from two Anglo-Saxon words, "summer" meaning the same as our word "summer" and "worth" which is a termination meaning place. It was also known as "Summer Heath". Today this community would be called Summersworth rather than Somersworth if it were not for the fact that someone in government confused the spelling and no one made an issue of correcting it.

Sixty-five parishioners signed the petition that Summersworth be incorporated as a parish. Part of the Act of Incorporation passed in December 19, 1729 reads, as follows:

Anno  
Regni Regis Georgii Secundi  
Tertis  
An Act

for the setting off of the northeast end of the town of Dover and erecting a Parish by the name of Summersworth.

Whereas the northeast end or part of the town of Dover is competently filled with inhabitants who labor under great difficultys by their remoteness from the place of publick worship....thereupon address this court that they may be set off as a distinct parish....

Be it therefore....Enacted by the Lieutenant Governor, Council and Representatives in General Assembly conven'd and by the authority of the same that the Northeast part of Dover as hereafter bounded and described be and hereby is sett off a Distinct and Separate Parish by the name of Summersworth.

The bounds of said parish to be as follows....and that the inhabitants of said lands be vested with all the priviledges and powers of the parish to chuse officers for the well regulating of the same and raise money from time to time for defraying the charges of the minister, school and poor Provided that the Inhabitants of the said parish do within the space of one year from the date of this Act, erect and finish a suitable House of Publick Worship of God and procure and settle a learned Orthodox minister of good conversation and make provision for his comfortable and honourable support.

(No records are available as to how long the meeting house had been in existence at the time the parish received its

corporate powers, but the charter read that this meeting house had to be built and completed within one year from December 19, 1729.)

The meeting house referred to in the Act probably was constructed in 1729 for a notice signed by Paul Wentworth, Thomas Wallingford and John Recker, selectmen, appointed a meeting of the new parish to be held at the meeting house January 12, 1730.

This first meeting house was erected on the west side of the road leading to Salmon Falls now known as Rollins Road. All that remains to mark this site is the First Parish burial ground and adjoining fields. All of this was made possible by a grant from Dover of ten acres for a meeting house and twenty acres for a parsonage.

The "learned minister of good conversation" chosen to minister to the settlement, Mr. James Pike, had already preached there before the parish was organized and he therefore knew the settlers beforehand.

Born in Newbury, Massachusetts, March 1, 1703, he was graduated from Harvard College in 1725, ordained on October 28, 1730. Previous to his ordination, he came to Berwick (now South Berwick) and was the first public school master of that town. His first opportunity to preach came three years before his ordination and final action was taken at a meeting at which Paul Wentworth was Moderator, and Thomas Miller, Clerk. It was an invitation to Mr. Pike to be "the settled minister of this Parish and to be called thereto and that his annual salary be one hundred thirty pounds and also twenty acres of land as near the meeting house as it can conveniently be got, to be his forever if he continues the parish minister until his death, and one hundred pounds for his settlement." A committee was appointed to act with the selectmen of the parish in notifying Mr. Pike of his call.

In March he accepted the call but not until after he had asked for and received "sixteen or twenty cord of good firewood annually to be hauled to his door to be added to his salary."

An agreement was also made that if he left the parish he was to return the land.

To his ordination ministers from as far away as Newbury, Massachusetts were invited, with two ministers from those churches who were invited to assist at the ceremony.

The Dover Enquirer carried this item regarding the ordination:

Summerheath - October 28, 1730

"This day the Reverend Mr. James Pike was ordained Pastor of



the church in this place. The ceremony was opened by Reverend Mr. Tufts, the Reverend Mr. Wise preached from the 9th chapter of Matthew, verses 37 & 38. The Reverend Mr. Rogers extended the right hand of fellowship.

The sermon was 58 pages long. Its title read "Prayer for a Succession and full supply of Gospel Ministers - very needful and suitable." A sermon preached at the ordination of the Reverend James Pike in the parish of Summersworth in Dover October 27, 1730 by Jeremiah Wise, M.A. - Pastor of the First Church of Christ of Brunswick, Maine.

The charge by Reverend Jonathan Cushing took three pages, and the right hand of fellowship by Reverend Mr. Rogers two pages more."

The selectmen assessed the parishioners for the ordination charges and the total sum was thirty pounds.

Thus with dedication of spirit and commitment to good works, the Olde Parish Church was established and over it Reverend Pike exerted a strong, beneficent influence. The text for his first sermon was from Ephesians 1:16-23.

In an Historical Sermon by the Reverend James H. Potter delivered in 1927, he spoke of Mr. Pike in the following way:

"From all accounts Mr. Pike must have been an exceptional man in many ways. His pastorate covered the later Colonial, Revolutionary, and post Revolutionary times. For three score years of this, one of the most exacting periods in our history, this man built himself into the life of the people of this region. During the privation of Revolutionary days, he for a time relinquished his entire salary, supporting himself from his own twenty-acre farm. All of what afterwards became Rollinsford and Somersworth he counted as his parish and made it his custom to visit every family at least once a year, spending the night in his rounds with whatever household darkness happened to find him. He seems to have been held in respect by all the community.

History says that the Quakers, though so generally ostracized, counted Mr. Pike as their friend, and that having on his parish visitation spent the night with a Quaker family, his host sped the good parson on his way in the morning with the word, "Friend Pike, I thank thee for this visit, and am happier for having seen thee." Such a tribute must have been the meat and drink of heartening encouragement to the soul of the departing minister. The people resorted to him not only for spiritual ministration but for aid in temporal things as well, for we are told

that his hand wrote, almost without exception, the legal documents of that time. When Wesley's friend and co-worker, Whitefield, visited this locality it was in Mr. Pike's home that he was entertained."

From old records one can visualize old Somersworth during the Pike era for it consisted of a meeting house, a school house, a grave yard, a training field and a parish, all of which were in 1772 located in the center of town. Mr. Pike's parish itself was very large, extending through what is now the Sligo area, Salmon Falls Village, Rollinsford Junction and the Fresh Creek area.

From Knapp's History of Somersworth comes this excerpt:

"Mr. Pike was a very powerful man - a fact which was of much service to him in the settlement of disputes. It is said that he and another minister in the course of a walk happened upon two men who were fighting. The combat was brought to an abrupt end by a summary separation of the fighters, each minister taking one bodily by his shoulders and walking off with him."

He was the father of seven children. His fifth son, Nicholas Pike, who graduated from Harvard in 1766 became one of the great mathematicians of his age and published a book on mathematics which was used as a standard textbook in most of the schools of his day.

Nicholas Pike also gave a scholarship to the Andover-Newton Theological School. Because his characteristics strongly resembled those of his father, the Deed of Gift is included herewith even though the scholarship no longer exists. Idealism combined with stern New England practicality, strict adherence to principles and beliefs, and brilliance of mind were inherent in both men. The foresight of Nicholas benefited his heirs, over 100 years after his death. In 1932, the initial gift and accrued interest as specified in the bequest, were returned to the administrator of the Estate of Joseph S. Pike, heir of Nicholas.

"1819 - Oct. 25  
DONATION BY NICOLAS PIKE, ESQ.

Wishing to contribute a portion of my earthly substance, according to the ability God hath given me, for the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ, and especially to aid in raising up a succession of able and pious men for the Ministry of the Word of Life:-

I, Nicholas Pike, of Newburyport, in the County of Essex, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Esquire, do hereby give, assign, and set over to the Trustees of Phillips Academy,

the sum of One Thousand dollars, in sacred trust for the founding of a Scholarship in the Theological Institution under their care; reserving to myself the right of paying the said Thousand dollars in such instalments as shall be convenient to me, my heirs, executors, and administrators, saving that the whole shall be paid in two years after my decease; the said sum of One Thousand dollars to be the said Trustees placed out at interest on good security, or vested in sure and permanent funds, and the interest or income thereof to be annually added to the fund, till the capital sum or fund shall be increased to the sum of Fourteen Hundred dollars, or a sum sufficient for the founding of a Scholarship; when, after the said capital sum or fund shall have thus arisen to the amount above mentioned, the interest or annual income thereof to be applied to the maintenance of a Scholar of genius and piety, in the said Theological Institution, so long as the several Professors shall adopt and practise agreeably to that solemn declaration of their faith in Divine Revelation, and in the fundamental and distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel, as expressed in the creed contained in the Second Article of "The Statutes of the Associate Foundation in the Theological Institution at Andover", signed by Moses Brown, William Bartlet, and John Norris, the twenty-first of March, eighteen hundred and eight. Said Scholar to be selected, instructed, supported, and regulated, according to the provisions of the Constitution and Laws of the said institution, and to adopt and practise the creed above mentioned; but should that creed cease to be professed and practised upon in the said institution, then the said Fund of Fourteen Hundred dollars or sum sufficient for the foundation of a Scholarship, shall revert to my heirs forever.

In witness where, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, the 25th day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and nineteen.

Signed and Sealed in Presence of  
Joseph S. Pike  
Luther F. Dimmick

Nicolas Pike (s) "

In 1790 Rev. Pike wrote to his people that he was weak in body and not able to carry on the work of his ministry any longer, and requested them to get someone to preach the gospel in his place. He offered to relinquish one-half of his seventy pound salary. The people agreed. He preached his last sermon October 21, 1790.

Reverend James Pike married August 26, 1730 Sarah Gilman of Exeter. They both died the same year, 1792, he on March 19 and

she on August 31, having lived together in married life for sixty years. He had served his people for over six decades as preacher, teacher, counselor, friend, sometimes police officer, and always ambassador of Christian goodwill to all classes in the community.

His funeral sermon was preached by Rev. Moses Hemingway, DD, whose text was Revelation 2:10: "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."

The Congregational Journal published at Concord, New Hampshire, January 10, 1850 reported as follows: "Near the junction of the Boston and Maine and Great Falls Railroad stands an ancient but well-preserved house with three venerable elms in front. In that house lived and died the first minister of Somersworth and these elms were borne from the forest on his shoulder and planted where they stand by his hand."

The house was built in 1730, and burned to the ground in 1903, the owner at that time being Judge Robert G. Pike, a great-great grandson of the Reverend James. Only one of the original three elm trees remains to mark the place where the Reverend James Pike lived and died.

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His funeral sermon was preached by Rev. Moses Hamlin, D.D., whose text was Revelation 14:10: "He that hath conquered death and I will give thee a crown of life."

The Postgraduate Journal, published at Concord, New Hampshire, January 10, 1896 reported as follows: "Near the junction of the Boston and Maine and Great Falls Railroad stands an ancient but well-preserved house with three veranda steps in front. In that house lived and died the first minister of Concord, and these steps were borne from the forest on his shoulder and planted where they stand by his hand."

The house was built in 1735, and burned to the ground in 1803, the owner at that time being Judge Robert S. Pike, a great-great-grandson of the Reverend James. Only one of the original trees and trees remains to mark the place where the Reverend James Pike lived and died.

## **Chapter IV**

**LIFE AND TIMES IN 18TH CENTURY**

**TRANSITION PERIOD - OLDE CHURCH**



## Chapter IV

LIFE AND TIMES IN 18TH CENTURY  
TRANSITION PERIOD - OLDE CHURCH

An annotated and indexed facsimile edition of Jeremy Belknap's History of New Hampshire, published by Peter E. Randall and Gary T. Lord, entitled Belknap's New Hampshire: An Account of the State in 1792, gives many interesting commentaries of life as it was lived during the time when the old order was slowly changing.

Says Belknap, "Were I to form a picture of happy society, it would be a town consisting of a due mixture of hills, valleys and streams of water; the land well fenced and cultivated; the roads and bridges in good repairs; a decent inn for the refreshment of travelers, and for public entertainments; the inhabitants mostly husbandmen, their wives and daughters mostly domestic manufacturers; a suitable portion of handicraft workmen and two or three traders; a physician and lawyer, each of whom should have a farm for his support.

A clergyman of any denomination, which should be agreeable to the majority, a man of good understanding of a candid disposition and exemplary morals, not a metaphysical or a polemic but a serious, practical preacher; a school master who should understand his business and teach pupils to govern themselves; a social library, annually increasing and under good regulation; a club of sensible men seeking mutual improvement; a decent musical society; no intriguing politicians, no horse jockey, gambler or sot, but all such characters treated with contempt. Such a situation may be considered as the most favorable to social happiness of any this world can afford."

Another interesting excerpt is the following concerning Spiritous Liquor: "Suffer me to add a few words on the use of spiritous liquor, that bane of society that destroyer of health, morals and property. Nature has indeed furnished her vegetable productions with spirits; but she has so combined it with other substances, that unless her work be tortured by fire, the spirit is not separated and cannot prove pernicious. Why could



this force be put on nature, to make her yield a noxious draught when all her original preparations are salutary?

The juice of the apple, the fermentation of barley, and the decoction of spruce are amply sufficient for the refreshment of man, let his labor be ever so severe and his perspiration so extensive. Our forefathers for many years after the settlement of the country knew not the use of distilled spirits. Malt was imported from England and wine from the western or Canary Islands .....

If we could check the consumption of distilled spirits and enter with vigor into the manufacture of maple sugars, of which our forests would afford an ample supply, the demand for West India productions might be diminished; the plantations in the islands would not need fresh recruits from Africa; the planters would treat with humanity their remaining blacks, and render them sufficiently prolific to supply them with a succession of laborers; the market for slaves would become less inviting and the navigation which is now employed in the most pernicious aspects of commerce which ever disgraced humanity, would be turned into some other channel."

This picture of the ideal society, while impossible of achievement, reveals the best thinking of the period, and signs of the time.

As for meeting houses of these early settlers, there were many problems involved, and had it not been for their valiant spirit the losses would have been tragic. After a lapse of years, the inhabitants outgrew the old church built in 1729 and a new one was erected in 1772, around which grew what is now called the Old Town Cemetery of Rollinsford.

According to the New Hampshire Gazetteer published in Concord, N.H. in 1823, the first meeting house erected in 1729 was taken down in 1773.

The aforementioned meeting house erected in 1772 was consumed by fire in a violent thunderstorm occurring May 4, 1779.

"It happened about the middle of the day. The steeple of the meeting house was struck with the lightning which passed down by one of the posts in the belfry adjoining the house and in about an hour it was in ashes. The bell was melted and fell in a state of fusion. The third meeting house was erected in 1780."

As for the old bell itself, pieces from its molten state were picked up years later by school children and church-goers.

The undaunted colonists constructed their new meeting house with a porch, a belfry and a spire, with 42 pews on the floor and 22 in the gallery. This building stood until 1848 when it was reportedly burned by a former state's prison inmate. The second and third meeting houses stood in the enclosure of the Old Town Cemetery in Rollinsford Junction.

During the interval after the fire the parishioners voted to accept "Mr. Rollins' free offer of the house where the town now meets to worship in, till the new meeting house is fit to live in, he reserving a berth for his family in the southeast corner of said house." These were hard times during and in the midst of the Revolutionary War, yet within a year and a half the town had a new meeting house, had sold its 42 pews on the floor and 22 in the gallery. The meeting house built in 1780 was occupied for town meetings until the town hall in what was later to be known as Great Falls was built.

To this olde parish at Rollinsford Junction came Reverend Pearson Thurston on February 1, 1792. He broke the bread of life to a congregation scattered over a great stretch of country. People came for miles to listen to his sermons and went home to ponder on God's wrath, for the minister is reported to have concentrated on God's anger not his love.

Picture him in the pulpit of the old meeting house northwest of the parsonage only a few rods. Visualize the tower which had been built over this part and the belfry constructed near the top. The parish, however, after the fire never got another bell. The tower part was left incomplete and one could look up through and see the blue sky. So, while listening to Mr. Thurston's exhortations, the people could look upward toward the heavens where the throne of God was commonly believed to have been located, and where the Judge of all men gave out His decrees.

The walls of the church were white. Great square pews filled the body of the house and a gallery ran around it where all who did not have pews could be seated.

Sabbath after Sabbath men and women came riding together on horseback to this church, the men dressed in small clothes, long stockings and low shoes and buckles; the women in short waisted gowns with mutton leg sleeves, poke bonnets, camelot cloaks and high heeled shoes.

Here Reverend Thurston, a 1787 Dartmouth graduate, remained for twenty years, the last permanent pastor of the olde parish church in Rollinsford. He was ordained February 1, 1792 and left December 2, 1812.

Among the few anecdotes remaining from this period is the



following: "At the parsonage was a deep well and the water was drawn with a sweep. One day the maid servant went out with a silver tankard to get water for the table. In her hurry she brushed the tankard from the curb and it fell into the well. The family tried to get it out but "live sand" prevented and today the silver tankard lies buried under many feet of earth."

One bitter cold night in mid-winter the people living nearby were awakened by a cry of fire and rushed out to see the parsonage in flames. Many were the theories as to how the house caught fire, but the theory that gained the most credence follows: The upper part of the house was not finished and a large quantity of tow (the fiber of flax prepared for spinning) was stored in one of the rooms. During the evening some member of the family went upstairs with a lighted candle and it was supposed that a spark was dropped and when the fire reached the tow it went up like gun powder. The family escaped with barely clothing enough to protect them from the severity of the weather. After this second fire in 1812 the parish felt too poor to build again although the framework of the parsonage had been erected it later rotted down. Mr. Thurston fully understood the state of affairs and asked for a dismissal from the parish. It was reluctantly granted. Mr. Thurston, "a thoroughly good man" went to Massachusetts where in 1819 he died.

Mr. Pearson Thurston's successor was Reverend Luke Spofford described as "a man of average talents but self-sacrificing to his mission". He was followed by Reverend Mr. Blodgett for whom no dates are available.

Mr. Blodgett's congregation constantly dwindled and he failed to receive sufficient support; therefore, he was forced to leave his little band.

For some time after Mr. Blodgett's departure there was no settled minister although occasionally a preacher was secured for a Sunday.

Because church records, communion vessels and a social library had been destroyed during the parsonage fire, the recording of history ceased to be a practice.

On January 21, 1819 the town voted for the meeting house to be open at all times "for all serious preachers of the true gospel of every name and denomination". The selectmen to be the judges and give their consent before any preacher be admitted to enter said meeting.

The Reverend Reuben Porter became the last pastor of the old parish church and later became the "stated supply" of what was

to become the new Somersworth church. He had remained in the small parish for about two years when it was left again without a shepherd. In 1827 the olde parish church had five members and in 1829 it had only two left.

in 1827 the new Congregational church. He had remained in the  
well for about two years when it was left again with-  
out a shepherd. In 1827 the old parish church had five  
members and in 1828 it had only two left.

## **Chapter V**

**BEGINNINGS AT GREAT FALLS -**

**PRE-CIVIL WAR PERIOD**

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

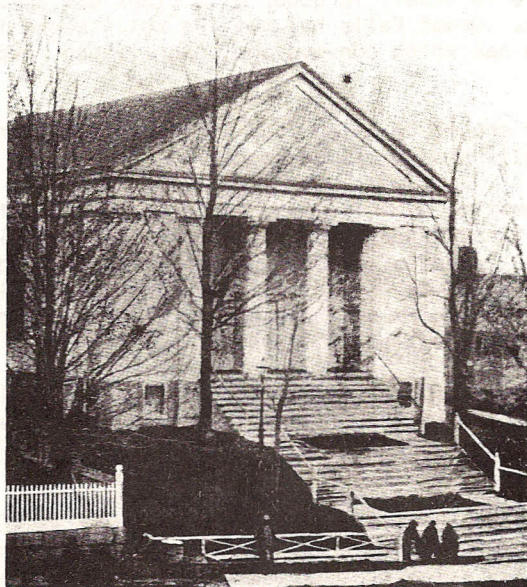
## Chapter V

BEGINNING AT GREAT FALLS -

PRE-CIVIL WAR PERIOD

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH





First Congregational Church 1827

Prior to the incorporation of the Great Falls Manufacturing Company in 1823, the site of Great Falls was devoted to farming purposes, and the few inhabitants of the neighborhood were numbered among the parishioners of Rev. Joseph Hilliard in Berwick, Maine (now South Berwick) and the Rev. Reuben Porter of the Old Parish Church.

The name of Great Falls had been given to part of the Salmon Falls River because the largest fall is located there, the



water dashing from ledge to ledge, a distance of a hundred feet or more, but no Niagara. For this reason it became the custom, until the latter part of the nineteenth century to refer to the locality itself as "Great Falls" even though it was within the community of Somersworth. In 1893, when Somersworth was incorporated as a city, the name "Great Falls" was no longer in use.

After all, Great Falls was really a misnomer according to one of Somersworth's outstanding citizens, Judge Christopher Wells, who in 1893 made the following observations in the Somersworth Free Press of which he was owner and editor:

"The falls here are not great; they are only moderate size ones. It is about such a name as a western booming town with a grocery store, three saloons and a dozen inhabitants would donate to itself in honor of a plank dam across a front brook. Great Falls has not the solid sound that Somersworth has which conveys age, dignity and respectability."

In passing it should be noted that Rollinsford was known as the Salmon Falls area of Summersworth.

Something dramatic, nevertheless, happened because of these very falls. Isaac Wendell, a quiet Quaker in Dover in 1822 recognized the potential of the waterfall in the woods for manufacturing purposes. He had already with John Williams engaged in the purchase of the Cocheco Falls in Dover and the manufacture of cotton cloth there.

Therefore, Somersworth changed from a farming to an industrial community. In 1821 nearly all of this area, 200 acres, was owned only by Mr. Gershom Horne.

The incorporation of the new company took place June 11, 1823 with a chartered capital of \$500,000. Previous to this time, Isaac Wendell had bought up the privileges of Great Falls as well as those on both sides of the Salmon Falls River for some distance above the falls and built some buildings for the manufacture of cloth.

Then came the building of No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 mills and the organizing of a company with the capital of \$1,000,000 in 1826 and in 1827 increased to \$1,500,000.

The new manufacturing company also played in 1827 a substantial role in the development of the spiritual life of this community for at this time it was thought advisable to organize a church here, and the manufacturing company generously contributed the lot and \$500.

In January 1827 the Piscataqua Association of Ministers met and approved the proposed covenant thus beginning "The First Congregational Church of Great Falls". The original group met with the Reverend Reuben Porter of the Olde Parish Church in a house on Bridge Street in Berwick which was rapidly outgrown.

Plans for the church were crystallized at a formal meeting held on September 13, 1827 in the village school house, when Joshua Edwards and J. W. Freeman were chosen as moderator and clerk. The meeting voted to be known as the First Congregational Society of Great Falls, New Hampshire.

Arrangements were immediately made for the erection of a suitable House of Public Worship. The following year the church edifice was completed at an expense of \$4,500 and dedicated in 1828.

The \$4,500 was divided into shares of \$50.00 each, and disposed of by subscription. Some 57 shares were sold, the records showing subscriptions from half a share to as many as five shares. The shareholders were organized into a group known as "Proprietors of the First Congregational Meeting House". The Building Committee consisted of Thomas Tripe, James Stanwood, J. L. Pierce, Jerry W. Orange and David Sillick.

The Reverend Josiah T. Hawes was to be its first settled preacher, taking the place of Reverend Reuben Porter, stated supply, and pastor of the Olde Parish Church.

The following is an account from the Portsmouth Journal September 13, 1828:

"Dedication. The elegant meeting house recently erected at Great Falls for the First Congregational Society in that village was solemnly dedicated on the 19th. The services were as follows: 1st anthem: "Lord Of All Thy Power and Might"; 2nd Introductory Prayer by Rev. George W. Campbell, South Berwick; 3rd Reading of the Scriptures by Rev. Joseph Hilliard, Berwick; 4th Hymn; 5th Dedicatory Prayer by Joseph T. Hawes, Pastor of the church; 6th anthem; 7th Sermon by Lyman Beecher, DD of Boston; 8th concluding prayer by Rev. Mr. Emerson."

A period of quiet, steady growth characterized the church and society from 1830 on. The Society had been aided for several years in support of its pastor by the Piscataqua Association, the New Hampshire Missionary Society and the Massachusetts Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. Its fiscal ability gradually increased with additional numbers, and the organization soon became self-supporting. The membership also grew to such an extent as to give the society a secure place of influence in the community. The records of the 1830's and 1840's, scanty though they are, show the usual entries of



money collected and spent, of members received or dismissed, and in a word, give the impression of things done effectively, "decently and in order".

The following is a description of the First Congregational Church derived from the Weeden Scrapbook, vol. II:

"The old church had simple Greek lines, chaste Doric columns and three tiers of approaching steps. It fitted the locality and gave a dignity and grace to the corner of High and Prospect Streets that forever passed away when the hillside was dug away to make room for a modern basement and vestry.

Galleries were added to this meeting house in 1853. The pulpit and gallery faced one another from opposite sides of the room. The choir was in the gallery. Pews had names and numbers. There was no aisle in the center of the church. The vestry was enlarged and the exterior altered in 1876. The church kept the same structure until it was sold in 1937."

On the 23rd of January 1828, Reverend Josiah T. Hawes was invited to become pastor of the church. He had been preaching before this at the church in Blackberry Hill, Berwick. This church, like the olde parish church, had become very feeble. Its history had extended back 75 years and the building up of Great Falls, as well as the organization of the First Congregational Church, had greatly weakened it. Mr. Hawes gave as his reason for leaving that the church could no longer carry on financially.

Mr. Hawes' pastorate in Somersworth lasted but two years. His style of preaching, though instructive and earnest, seems to have been, on the whole, rather unpopular. Also, the congregation was somewhat scattered. Mr. Hawes was assisted by a young man named Daniel Sanford who came from Andover Seminary. He, in contrast to his older mentor, was possessed of a pleasing personality. Thus, during their joint labors, quite a religious interest was created and forty-one persons joined the church.

Apparently Mr. Hawes was not aloof from all worldly concerns for one of the conditions of his acceptance to the call of the church was that if any part of his salary should fail to be raised that the same proportion of time should be at his own disposal.

With Mr. Hawes' coming to Great Falls, it was coincidental that two churches of former days, Rollinsford and Blackberry Hill, had each contributed its last pastor to carry on in a new place, and under conditions of a new day.

Information regarding Mr. Hawes is far from complete, but the comment "his work as pastor and acting pastor covered sixty years and during his life he wrote 2,365 sermons" tells something of his work habits and character.

Mr. Hawes was dismissed from the pastorate of the church January 6, 1830. At the same time, Mr. William Twining was ordained here as an Evangelist. He was never a settled pastor of the church.

At his ordination the introductory prayer was given by Reverend Willey of Rochester, the sermon by Reverend Smith of Exeter, the Consecration Prayer by Reverend Winslow of Dover, the Charge by Reverend Page of Durham, the Right Hand of Fellowship was extended by Reverend Keeler of South Berwick and the Concluding Prayer by Mr. Hawes.

Mr. Twining's tenure, though short, was successful. The first general revival in the history of the church occurred, and 104 were added to its numbers.

Mr. Twining was succeeded by Reverend James A. Smith whose pastorate extended over a period of five years (April 1832 - July 1837). He was ordained as a pastor of the church April 17, 1832. One hundred twenty-five new members were added to the church rolls during his time. The deacons listed in this period were Thomas Shapleigh, Josiah Beane and J. W. Orange. (For the latter Orange Street was named.)

Reverend Alfred Goldsmith followed as acting pastor from 1837-1838. His pastorate lasted only eleven months.

John R. Adams (1838-1840) who succeeded him was also an acting pastor. He served the church during a period of high religious interest when seventy were added to the church.

Reverend Samuel Beane was ordained pastor of the church July 7, 1841. According to the records, seven united with the church during his pastorate.

It should be remembered that at this time the Victorian Age had been ushered in and the Civil War was yet to come. During the Victorian era the influence of England's queen was felt on both sides of the Atlantic. It was an age of stability, of high moral purpose, of idealism, innocence - marred only by the high censoriousness of others who did not or could not meet the standards set for them by the strict lady who sat on England's throne for so many years, dominating much of 19th century thought.

The temperance issue was strongly felt in those days and expressed itself at church meetings. Resolutions were taken,



as follows: "Whereas total abstinence from buying, selling or drinking ardent spirits, except prescribed by a physician, is to us the only consistent course for the Christian; therefore resolved that we do not admit to our church any person acting on different principles." Two years later a member was excommunicated for "getting intoxicated and otherwise disgracing the Christian profession".

A typical Victorian was Isaac Wendell, the owner of the new mills, who was also a teetotaler. No intoxicating drink was allowed on the site, but liquor was often secretly obtained. The laborers building the walls for the canal near the mill left little hiding places for the bottles. Isaac Wendell had no control in Maine, and the men sent their shoes to be mended there, he thought, rather oftener than was necessary, and, one day observing the messenger boy returning with a pair of boots, he approached the boy on the bridge; but before they met the boots went over the railing into the river.

As for the affairs of the parish, they moved steadily forward, and throughout the 1830's and 1840's the records show funds collected and spent, numbers received and dismissed.

In those days excommunication was not uncommon. From 1827-1858 twenty-nine were listed as having been excommunicated from the church. Their names were published in the Manual of the First Congregational Church, Great Falls, New Hampshire. Although the Manual was published in 1890 under the leadership of the Reverend J. M. Dutton, there were no excommunications after 1858, even though according to the rules of the church the practice was allowable.

The Manual specifically states that those who "broke the covenant or failed to discharge the duties devolving on them in the sanctuary, in their prayers ("family or closet"), those who did not go to church regularly were subject to this penalty. Immoral conduct, of course, was another cause for banishment. The provision in the Manual read as follows: "Any person accused before the church, shall be furnished with a copy of the complaint against him and shall have an impartial hearing."

Avowed disbelief in any of the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel was not to be tolerated. It was the function of the Standing Committee to examine candidates for admission to the church and to investigate all accusations against its members.

It may be significant that most of the excommunications occurred during the acting pastorates of William Twining and John R. Adams. Apparently when there was no "settled minister"; the stern old deacons wielded their authority to the utmost.

"This church regards itself as authorized to exercise discipline as a means of maintaining its own purity and of vindicating the honor of the Master. It accepts Matthew 18, verses 15-17 as its divine guide and director.

"But if thy brother sin against thee, go and show him his fault, between thee and him alone. But if he listen to thee, thou hast won thy brother. But if he do not listen to thee, take with thee one or two more so that on the word of two or three witnesses every word may be confirmed. And if he refuse to hear them, appeal to the church, but if he refuse to hear even the church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican."

The Bible was taken literally as was every word of the Covenant.

In 1850, Lord Tennyson had published his In Memoriam, an elegy sequence recording his years of doubt and despair and culminating in an acceptance of immortality. His words:

"There lies more faith  
in honest doubt  
Believe me than in half  
the creeds."

had not been widely read except among the intelligensia.

It was not until 1859 that Charles Darwin set forth the structure and massive support of his theory in Origin of the Species, evidence that is not accepted by certain groups to this day.

The deacons of old had a firm foundation to their faith and never questioned that they were right. Their path was indeed straight and narrow.

Although this is an historical narrative of Congregationalism in Somersworth, it should be noted that the building in which services are now held was the original Methodist Episcopal and came to be the home of the First Parish United Church of Christ, Congregational, through federation and absorption.

The church one entered in the 1840's was a plain, square building with plain straight-back pews and with little by way of adornment. In 1844 a new pulpit floor was laid, and the walls were freshly painted. Blinds were added to the windows.

On July 29, 1848 a bell arrived and was hung in the belfry and the following day rung by John Haines, Sr. In his diary he wrote as follows: "It is a fine, smooth casting, toned on G and weighing 1,816 pounds. The yoke and all together weighed 2,150 pounds and it is as fine and pure sounding a church bell as I have ever heard, very deep and musical. I am not certain whether this is the first musical timepiece owned by the church."



In 1848, it was voted to have a seraphine (a 19th century reed instrument similar to an organ) and timepiece in the church. The "seraphine" proved to be a reed organ made for a church in Concord and purchased for \$350.

The date of the purchase of the present organ is not known but it must have been before 1880 as it was moved from the back to the front of the church at that time.

The Knapp History states that between 1827-1833 four Protestant churches were organized in Great Falls Village. In respect to age, the First Congregational Church takes precedence in this community, being organized January 16, 1827. The High Street Methodist was a junior by only a few months as it was organized September 22 of the same year. Third in age was the Free Baptist August 18, 1828, while the First Baptist Church was not organized until five years later. For a time (1831-1845) there were Universalists in Somersworth, and they built a church on Beacon Street which was removed in 1845. The Episcopalians for a short time had an organization and worshipped at the corner of Washington and Elm Streets. The Main Street Methodist Church was built in 1852; the Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church in 1858, and St. Martin in 1882.

There was a general revival of religion in the early 1800's when over one hundred names were added to the list of members. This outpouring of the spirit seemed to continue through most of the 19th century. Undaunted by so-called scientific advances, denominationalism grew along with it.

Through the Civil War period in the five strong Protestant churches in town each person who was a working Christian made it his business to bring souls to his own church, thinking that thereby he was doing his Master's business.

In an issue of the Somersworth Free Press, March 23, 1929, a Miss Margaret Brackett wrote as follows:

"In the old days no one was ashamed of having his preference or creed known. When my Aunt Mary passed the First Congregational Church on the way to the Free Baptist, her own tabernacle, she would say to the janitor who was sweeping the entry - if it happened to be a dry, cold day, "This is a good day for you, Mr. Blank. Congregationalists like dry, cold weather." While the wielder of the broom might observe, if it was raining, "This is a good day for you, Mary. Free Baptists like lots of water."

All went to church in those old days, and the majority of the people were members. But it wasn't an easy thing to get into an old church. In most of them, all candidates for

membership had to come before a committee and relate their experiences and answer various questions. They then retired and were voted on. If then found acceptable, their houses or boarding places were visited by a committee who made inquiries to ascertain if their lives corresponded to their high and holy professions.

Dancing and card playing were strictly prohibited and if theater-going was not tabooed in Great Falls, it was because there was at that time no opera house.

Reverend James T. McCallom served from 1844 to 1853. Apparently there was an interim period during 1844 when James B. Thornton served as acting pastor until Mr. McCallom was installed, but records here are incomplete and contradictory. At any rate, Reverend McCallom's pastorate lasted from 1844 to December 1853 and James B. Thornton is definitely listed as an "acting pastor" from April 1854 to October 1855.

Concerning Mr. McCallom the following comment which came from the Weeden Historical Scrapbook, vol. III, provides insight:

"Our genial and beloved pastor, Rev. James T. McCallom, whose face was a benediction, passed through the crowded gatherings with always a pleasant smile and a kind word. The children were never overlooked by him and it was always a source of great disappointment to us to be absent from home during a pastoral call."

During Mr. McCallom's time, the need for a larger seating capacity in the church became acute. In 1853 galleries were added and so remained until the church was sold some seventy-five years later.

An interesting sidelight is also noted herewith:

Apparently Mr. McCallom's abilities had been proclaimed sufficiently so that wider opportunities became nearly, but not quite, available to him.

An inquiry regarding the qualifications of Mr. McCallom to fill the vacancy in a Congregational church in Cincinnati was sent to Mr. J. A. Burleigh, Agent for the Great Falls Manufacturing Company, by one Gustavus Ricker.

Part of Mr. Ricker's letter is quoted because of its quaintness of style and expression. He requested "Good powers as an extempore orator would, of course, not be objectionable, in fact almost needed in this city of sin and wickedness".

Mr. Burleigh's reply is given in its entirety:



"Great Falls, July 11, 1850

Gustavus Ricker, Esq.

Dr. Sir:

Mr. McCallom has been in this place about six years and with us has proved himself to possess the qualifications which you say are desired in a man for one of your churches. You will, however, bear in mind, that congregations as well as churches in Cincinnati are very different from the little church and society in Great Falls. Whether Mr. McCallom would sustain himself equally well in the church to which you allude is a matter of which I am unable to give you an opinion.

Respectfully yours,

J. A. Burleigh "

According to the record, Mr. McCallom stayed in Somersworth until 1853, and Mr. Burleigh's letter was written in 1850. Posterity may judge whether or not the minister was "damned by faint praise" or whether the hand of God reached out to keep him in Somersworth where he did excellent work.

During Mr. McCallom's pastorate seventy-six were received into the church. The Sabbath School became for the first time a regular organization. Its constitution was adopted in 1850. Before that time it had been simply an appendage of the church, having no rules of its own. There is no record of the number of students in attendance, but there must have been a great many, probably including all ages - children through adults - for there is recounted that in 1865 there were 253 with an average attendance of 139, and in 1876 the whole number was 265 - average attendance 125, indicating a steady growth since Mr. McCallom's time.

Apparently Mr. McCallom had among his other outstanding qualities that of being public-spirited. He spoke at the Public Meeting held at Union Hall October 27, 1852, paying tribute to the memory of Daniel Webster. At this time guns were fired and bells were tolled.

When the land now occupied as Forest Glade Cemetery was purchased by the town in 1851 for \$1,200, exercises for its consecration were held October 3, 1852. Mr. McCallom gave the sermon at that time, and his wife wrote an ode which she delivered. Other ministers of the town also took part.

Mr. McCallom offered prayer at the dedication of the High School April 4, 1850. He stated that Somersworth had a nearly model school, mentioned the maps that reminded him of the

progress made in geography, blackboards of the progress made in arithmetic since the days of the renowned arithmetic by our townsman Pike. "Arithmetic has been made a pleasant study, also grammar and philosophy. The boys and girls we used to have have now become young gentlemen and ladies, a credit to the community."

An acting minister from April 1854 to October 1855, Reverend James H. Thornton was next to serve the parish. He was described by one of his parishioners as a "king among men like Saul among the prophets; head and shoulders above his brethren". During his pastorate thirty-four were received into membership in the church. He was followed by Reverend George N. Anthony, a graduate of Brown University and Andover Theological School, who was ordained here in 1855. His pastorate extended four years and three months. Mr. Anthony was described as a "scholarly gentleman". From here he moved to Marlboro, Massachusetts, and subsequently settled in Peabody from where he was elected Treasurer of the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society. It was during his pastorate that the Second Congregational Church was organized.

Miss Elizabeth Putnam Pope described in a 1926 issue of the Somerset Free Press an incident recalled from her childhood:

"Mrs. Anthony rose from her pew one Sunday in great haste, stepped into the aisle, shaking her skirts with great vehemence, and was rewarded by the hasty exit of a little kitten which had climbed the ladder of her hoopskirt for shelter, having come to the service, perhaps, in search of the proverbial church mouse."

It happened that in 1851 a Reverend Henry Hall was appointed to the Great Falls Mission, an independent group. Whether or not there was a connection between this organization and that of the Second Congregational Church has not been established. Of the attendant circumstances little is known except that from the records it is clear that services had been underway in the Town Hall in 1856. By the summer of the following year the proposal was to organize a church, and it was done July 20, 1857. There was apparently no dissension, for the members leaving the First Congregational Church did so with the blessing and good wishes of fellow parishioners. Rev. Mr. Chapman was the minister who conducted services until 1861. Because of discouraging circumstances the church was dissolved in September of that year. No building had been erected and the society had met in homes of the parishioners.

Following the pastorate of Mr. Anthony as minister of the First Church, the Reverend H. G. Butterfield, DD (who had also served as a chaplain during the Civil War) was called here. Possessed of a superior mind, he made maximum use of his talents, and



left Somersworth to become President of Olivet College in Michigan.

In an issue of the Somersworth Free Press, February 22, 1926, Miss Elizabeth Putnam Pope described Dr. Butterfield as "an earnest preacher and gracious pastor"... "He came to tie the knot at the wedding of my Aunt Sarah and Uncle Oliver Shaw and remained at the call of a child sick with scarlet fever in the upper room, saying he must look after the lambs in his flock"...not so much considered a duty or obligation in these days!

Rev. Dr. Butterfield died in 1894, a pneumonia victim.

One of his parishioners, a high school teacher, Laura Ann Wentworth Fowler, made this notation in a diary she kept - Sketches of Great Falls High School (Weeden, vol. III):

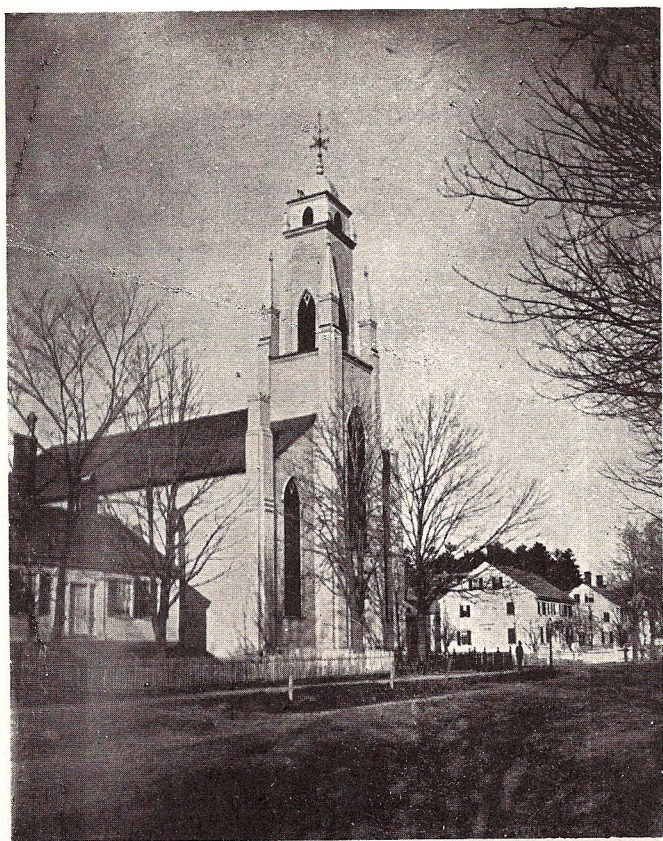
"February 1, 1862. Mr. Butterfield has given us two good practical sermons. Mr. Butterfield thinks by rule and compass and draws his illustrations from geometry."

Mr. Butterfield cared for this parish during the horrendous days of the Civil War when feelings ran high. By way of illustration, Laura Ann Wentworth Fowler further commented in her journal concerning the dismissal of the high school principal. A capable man, who happened to be a Democrat. For this reason it was feared that he must necessarily be a southern sympathizer. Mr. Butterfield joined her and other charitable thinkers in lamenting this injustice.



High Street Methodist Episcopal Church 1828





Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church 1855

# Chapter VI

CIVIL WAR PERIOD  
THROUGH  
ERA OF THE CENTENNIAL

# Chapter VI

CIVIL-WAR PERIOD  
THROUGH  
ERA OF THE CENTENNIAL

If ever two peoples were unprepared for war, the peoples of the north and south were in 1861.

In its blind, brutal, and unendurably expensive way the Civil War did accomplish one thing. It created one nation destined for world leadership, and it once and forever expanded the dimensions of American freedom. It brought negro slavery to an end; doing that, it left us no conceivable alternative to the task of creating and defending one class citizenship in our land - a task that is far from finished.

For the white people of America the peculiar institution, slavery was an issue to defend or attack. Like the country itself, the church became a house divided, though not in New England - or New Hampshire.

In the deepest sense, slavery was a threat not only to the Union, but to the religious ideal that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.

In the north, the abolitionist movement found its strength among those who felt strongly that all black or white were children of one Creator.

The eleventh pastor of the church during this period, was Reverend Ephraim N. Hidden who was installed January 5, 1865 and dismissed December 30, 1869. During his ministry at the close of the Civil War the following Articles of Faith were set forth:

1. We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God and to be observed as the rule of our faith and practice.



2. We believe that there is one God, infinite in power, wisdom and goodness, existing in three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, possessing distinct and equal attributes, and in some unrevealed manner so united as to constitute one God.
3. This God, we believe, is the Creator of all things, the moral governor of all worlds, working all things which take place in the universe after the counsel of His own will.
4. We believe that our first parents were created in the image of God, perfectly holy, by disobedience fell from this holy and happy state, and that in consequence of their fall all mankind, as soon as they became capable of accountable action, do most freely and wickedly withhold from God the obedience which his law requires, and continue transgressors of the law and under its penalty until renewed by the Holy Spirit in the exercise of repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
5. We believe that men are entirely free in their moral actions, and therefore without excuse for transgression.
6. We believe that Christ, the second person of the adorable Trinity, as a mediator, was manifested in the flesh, became man, and being obedient unto the law, by his sufferings and death made atonement for the sins of the world.
7. We believe that those who repent of their sins, and believe in Christ, being born of the spirit, are pardoned and restored to the favor of God.
8. We believe that those who thus repent of their sins and believe in Christ, being born of the Spirit, are not justified by the deeds of the law but by the grace of God, through faith in Christ, and that in the use of the appointed means of sanctification, they will continue to advance in a course of increasing conformity to the will of God until death; when they will become perfectly holy and happy.
9. We believe that there are two gospel ordinances, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are to be observed by all who believe in Christ and make profession of their faith, and that the infant children of such are proper subjects for baptism.
10. We believe in the immortality of the soul, in the final judgment, and in a state of eternal retribution in

which the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment and the righteous into life eternal.

The following Standing Rules were also adopted by the parish members:

Article I. This church shall be called the First Congregational Church of Great Falls, N. H.

Article II. Its officers shall be a pastor and two or more deacons who shall be chosen by ballot as vacancies occur; a clerk who shall be chosen by ballot at the annual meeting; who shall keep the records of the church, furnish certificates to members dismissed and recommended to other churches, and conduct the correspondence of the church generally; a Treasurer, chosen at the annual meeting, who shall have charge of all moneys and other property belonging to the church and shall present a written report at the annual meeting, or at the expiration of his term of office, and file the same with the clerk; and a Standing Committee of five members to be chosen at the annual meeting; who shall unite with the pastor in the examination of candidates for admission, institute inquiries in case of alleged immorality of members, and report the facts ascertained to the church whose general interest they shall at all times superintend.

Article III. There shall be a meeting for such business as may properly come before the church at the close of each preparatory lecture; and at the lecture next preceding the first Sabbath of January, shall be the annual meeting for the choice of officers as before designated, and the Standing Committee may call an extra meeting when they deem it advisable or if requested in writing by ten members of the church of which due notice shall be given.

The ministry of the Reverend Clark Carter followed that of Reverend Hidden. He was installed April 27, 1870 and dismissed in June 1872. There were fifteen members added during his ministry.

Following was Reverend Stephen W. Webb who served for eight years, and during whose pastorate the meeting house was greatly enlarged.

He was writer of the Centennial Sermon of the First Congrega-



tional Church. In the year 1876 a revival wave spread over the village; in a period of two years seventy-two were received into the church, fifty-six by profession of faith, and sixteen by letter.

The Great Falls Journal reported in the issue of July 14, 1876 the text of the Centennial Sermon:

"Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof, mark ye her bulwarks, consider her palaces that ye may tell them to generations following." Psalms 48:12,13.

Excerpts are herein quoted as indicative of the idealism of the period and the pride of a growing nation:

"Our nation is now holding in Philadelphia its centennial exhibition....From the Atlantic to the Pacific slope - from Maine to Oregon - from the lakes to the gulf, all products of the country are represented. The products of the soil, the fabrics of the loom, the manufacturers of the workshop all are here exhibited. Art and Science, agriculture and commerce; all multifarious industries of our civilization have there a place. We point with pride to all these - the achievements of our natural life spanned as it is by a single century. We point with pride to them and bid the nations pause and look. "Where," we ask, "Where is the nation who in the short limits of 100 years has achieved such wondrous results - has made such a prodigious stride in all that goes to make up a high civilization? In what nation has there been greater activity? Where has there been vaster resources more rapidly developed? Where has genius been more inventive? Where manifested greater energy and determination? Where have commerce and agriculture, art and science produced riper results than in the first century of our national life? These are the questions we ask the nations and bid them answer."...

"The naivete of these comments becomes apparent 100 years later....Our institutions are all of yesterday. Our structures are yet free from the moss and stain of ages."

Mr. Webb then went on to cite the changes wrought in national life during the fifty years preceding 1876. To name a few were: (1) the addition of thirteen states to the Union; (2) the invention of the locomotive and the building of 60,000 miles of track; (3) in 1838 the first steamship crossed the Atlantic; (4) in 1839 the first express company was organized; (5) in 1844 the first telegraph line was erected; (7) the invention and wide use of telegraphy; (8) the publication of over 8,000 newspapers throughout the land; (9) the swiftly plying steamers that went back and forth like shuttles between the Old World and the New; (10) San Francisco's growth of popu-

lation to over 200,000; (11) Chicago claimed a population of 400,000.

Mr. Webb also spoke with pride at the growth of the church during the fifty-year period. "The number of persons who have been identified with this church during its history of nearly fifty years is 746. The present number of members is 232... Year by year the number of those associated with the early history of this church is growing less and less....Very few now remain - Upon older and younger ones, on us who are here assembled today - must come the burden and the labor. ... Blessed shall we be, if they who are gathered here one hundred years from now shall be able to say of us, "They were faithful to their trust".

In 1876 important alterations and repairs were made in the church. The matter had been a long time pending for the question of repairs had been brought up at several annual meetings prior to 1876. A more adequate vestry was needed, for the church had for a considerable period resorted to a building on Washington Street for its meetings other than the Sunday services.

Parts of a letter written by Elizabeth Putnam Pope for the March 4, 1926 edition of the Free Press bears quotation so that one can conjure up a picture of the church of the 1850's, 60's and early 70's.

"The church of my childhood approached by three broad flights of stairs. We reached the portico and pillars and front of the edifice beautifully paneled. The entrance at either end of the porch opened into small vestibules, stairways curving into the galleries, and green barge doors swinging invitingly into the sanctuary. Beneath our feet was a cheery red and black carpet. Upon the wall a huge moon-faced clock was framed in gold. Over our heads a stucco centerpiece of purple grapes and green leaves was typical of communion. Two long aisles ran between the white painted pews trimmed with mahogany and with swinging doors held by brass buttons to the platform whereon stood the fine mahogany pulpit and generous hair-cloth covered mahogany sofa capable of seating a number of clergymen on special occasions. Beside the altar was a communion table with the silver tankard and goblets - simple and dignified - and opposite, the singing gallery littered with hymn books, "Watts and Select Hymns" and "Harp of Judah" containing anthems."



# Chapter VII

LATE VICTORIAN PERIOD  
TO THE  
DEPRESSION OF THE 1930'S



## Chapter VII

DEPRESSION OF THE 1930'S  
TO THE  
LATE VICTORIAN PERIOD



The Reverend Samuel Bell served the parish as acting pastor from September 1882 through December 1884. Then came the pastorate of the Reverend John M. Dutton, lasting from 1885 - 1891. A Dartmouth graduate he was interested and actively participated in educational as well as religious matters.

The Darwinian theory was not dismissed lightly among the intelligensia of whom there was, in his time, a large proportionate number. In 1885 the year Mr. Dutton came to Somersworth, Col. Robert G. Ingersoll, a nationally known orator, lawyer and son of a Congregational minister, and also termed "the great agnostic" gave a lecture here entitled "Which Way?" Here, as elsewhere, he drew a large audience since he was one of the greatest orators of his day, and was even acclaimed by Henry Ward Beecher as "the most brilliant speaker of the English tongue of all men on the globe".

Although he drew a crowd, the newspaper account made on September 29, 1885 was as follows: "He discussed his peculiar beliefs in a very original manner, though his remarks were often too flippant, his sarcasm too coarse, to give his lecture the semblance of an argument from a man seeking the truth for its own sake."

Into a climate of reason and faith came Mr. Dutton. According to the tribute given in the Free Press June 22, 1902, "His years in Somersworth were years of usefulness and honor and the influences of his good work were felt not only in the church and society but also in educational matters and affairs of the community generally. He was a large man, mentally and morally, as he was physically. There was no littleness about him, but his nature moved on broad, even planes, up above the petty things of life. No pastor that the church ever had was more

popular than he and the memory of no one will be held in more affectionate remembrance than will his. The world lost a noble man in his death at age 55."

By way of substantiating the point that Somersworth in 1885 was a cultured community, another national figure, Miss Frances Willard, founder of the W.C.T.U., also lectured in Somersworth. While here, she was the guest of the Reverend Thomas Tyrie, the Methodist Episcopal minister at the time.

The Reverend Howard W. Pope became minister here September 1892 with his installation. (And not until 1906 when the Reverend Albert C. Fulton was installed was there another installation ceremony.) Mr. Pope left April 1894 to go to New Haven, Connecticut, as secretary of an association devoted to evangelical work.

The Reverend Henry Hyde, who followed Mr. Pope, came to Somersworth in 1893 after a distinguished career as a legislator in Massachusetts, and a preacher in the Congregational Church at Holyoke, Massachusetts, as well as in the Second Congregational Church at Greenfield, Massachusetts.

In Somersworth he served as minister from 1894-1905. His ministry of eleven years covered the turn of the century, and his wise, able leadership guided the church through the critical period when changes in population were bringing about new religious groupings in the community.

Mr. Hyde and his family first lived in the Goodwin house at the corner of Maple and Linden Streets. Then, the next year, through the generosity of the Honorable Daniel G. Rollins, the Congregational parsonage at 32 Prospect Street was presented to the parish and the Hyde family were the first to occupy it. They lived there for ten years until Mr. Hyde retired from the active ministry. He then purchased the James B. Shapleigh house at 25 Prospect Street in which the family lived for many years, and which later his daughter, Miss Maude Hyde, most generously willed to the parish in memory of her father, and for whom the new Hyde Parsonage was later named.

During Mr. Hyde's retirement he supplied for a number of years in Massachusetts churches and was also sought as a Memorial Day speaker in Holyoke, Massachusetts where he addressed audiences from three to five thousand.

From the Somersworth Free Press of February 27, 1919 quoted as follows:

"The Reverend Mr. Hyde has moved among the people of Somersworth for twenty-five years. There is hardly a family in the Congregational parish whom he has not visited. He



had "the common touch" and made friends wherever he went in all walks of life. He was a fine preacher, and his sermons were broad and charitable in tune. He looked at large things in religion and not at petty non-essentials for he was a man of sterling common sense, a man of practical things as well as high ideals."

In the March issue of the Congregationalist 1919 was the following tribute:

"The Reverend Henry Hyde died February 24, 1919 after having lived a true Christian life. His loyalty to churches was a marked characteristic of his life. No matter how small the church, it could always command and receive his counsel and help. He was especially beloved by the younger pastors who will cherish the memory of this "Great Heart" among the ministers of New England."

Mr. Hyde's ministry was followed by that of Reverend A. C. Fulton who was said to have had outstanding qualities as a man as well as a preacher.

For the first time since 1892 installation services were held at the Congregational Church in 1905. After a large delegation assembled as a council to examine the preacher, Reverend Mr. Fulton read a paper entitled "Socialism". Its thesis was the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The examination proved satisfactory, and the installation took place. Samuel Dana preached the sermon, "Fulfill the Ministry". Reverend Henry Hyde, former pastor of the church, delivered the address to the people. Reverend Fulton gave the benediction. He was the nineteenth pastor of the church.

In addition to being a pastor, he was also Probation Officer. The law which was patterned after the Massachusetts law gave the police court broad jurisdiction over delinquent or neglected children under seventeen years of age. Mr. Fulton took a great interest in such children. He established a gymnasium which was most beneficial to the community. He believed in the good even in the most unfortunately situated child.

Somersworth had no gymnasium at the time; so he fitted up the barn connected with the Congregational parsonage to be used as a gymnasium for boys and young men and on certain days by girls and women of the parish.

Mr. Fulton, who had an athletic record, well understood the use and abuse of equipment.

The floor space was 35 ft. square and was used for class work, calisthenics and drills. The high loft in the barn afforded ample room for apparatus, such as rings, crossbars, parallel

bars, weight machines, Indian clubs and dumbbells.

Money needed for heating, for apparatus, shower baths, and for further development was raised by popular subscription.

During the pastorate of Mr. Fulton in 1907 an organ was given the church by Caroline E. Rollins, Mrs. Susan Pope and Mrs. Mary P. Rollins.

The letter from the donors dated December 22, 1907, is quoted as follows:

"To the glory of the Most High God whose favor has blessed them these many happy years, and in memory of the dear ones who have joined the heavenly choirs, the donors of this organ present it to the church they love so well with the hope that it may inspire us to nobler worship and loftier praise of the Christ whose birthday we are so soon to celebrate."

In 1908 the church had 147 members. In that year also occurred the passing of notable citizens and church members: Dr. Charles Swasey, Deacon William Symes, and Deacon Smith.

During that same year a committee was chosen to examine and report on the matter of a hymnal. The hymn book chosen was published by the Century Company and entitled "Hymns of Worship and Service." The Rollins family gave \$100 to purchase the books.

Succeeding the pastorate of Mr. Fulton was that of Asa Parker. He came to the First Parish Church fresh from his studies at Bangor Theological School in June 1910, and left Somersworth for Everett, Massachusetts in 1913.

Mr. Parker was a trustee of the New Hampshire Sunday School Association, vice president of the New Hampshire Christian Endeavor, president of the Ocean Park Missionary Education Conference, and secretary of the Strafford Association of Congregational Churches. A graduate of Williams College before entering theological training, he had done extensive YMCA work in Brooklyn, New York, Worcester, Massachusetts, and Whitman, Massachusetts, as well as having been field secretary for the Massachusetts Christian Endeavor. At his resignation the resolutions of the Congregational Society expressed deep regret and cited his beautiful Christian character, devoted pastoral work, and a deep appreciation of his service to the church and this community.

It followed that after a long, outstanding service as President of Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Mississippi, Dr. Frank Woodworth had retired to St. Johnsbury, Vermont. The Congregational Conference, however, aware of Somersworth's needs



and Dr. Woodworth's talents, informed this church of his possible availability; thus, he received a call to come to Somersworth.

Of a distinguished family and the brother of Dr. Robert Woodworth, noted psychologist and author, this cavalier gentleman had spent the major part of his life helping to educate black people. Far ahead of his time in his thinking, he was an eloquent speaker and also a scholar.

Although Dr. Martin Luther King had not been born during the lifetime of Dr. Woodworth, his ringing words remind one of some of the feelings expressed by Dr. Woodworth in earlier years:

"There are still millions of people in America who believe that God made all men equal. There are still millions of people who believe that out of one blood God made all people to dwell upon the face of the earth."

Parishioners who still remember Dr. Woodworth attest to his worth and to the privilege it was to have had him as a leader of this parish for twelve years.

A worthy successor, James H. Potter, who had been reared in New York State of a family that gave to the Christian ministry all three of its sons, was ordained in 1918, and immediately enlisted as a private in the United States Army. He served six months and was retired with a chaplain's commission in the Reserve Corps.

His Installation service took place in Somersworth October 16, 1929 and he began his ministry in November. Dr. Charles Reynolds Brown, Dean of Yale Divinity School, preached the installation sermon. Mr. Potter had come to Somersworth after attending Union College, Schenectady, and graduating from Hartford Theological School. Two years of graduate study at Harvard and Chicago had been followed by missionary work in India during the Madras presidency. Somersworth was his first settled parish.

Records of the church and Reverend Potter's historical sermon marking the 100th anniversary of the First Congregational Church bear witness of an original mind. The sermon was delivered January 23, 1927. The observance of the occasion proved to be appropriate, simple and impressive, and the observance occurred in the same house of worship, though remodeled, which was dedicated in 1828. Hundreds attended the services which Mr. Potter, then a new preacher, with barely eight weeks in the community, effectively organized. Copies of the anniversary sermon still exist and give ample evidence of abundant research done in a short time, and of an address



which was eloquent, interesting, and inspiring.

At this period in the history of the church, the Congregational Society appeared to have been very well organized. Besides the regular roster of deacons, wardens, executive officers, and Sunday School officials, it had a woman's guild, and a younger people's society which Dr. Woodworth called the Amici.

This society lasted so long that eventually this young woman's society became an older woman's society and finally dissolved when the original members died or became incapacitated.

As for the 100th anniversary of the First Congregational Society, it occurred September 11 and 12, 1927.

On Sunday morning the usual service was arranged with special reference to this anniversary. The sermon given by Mr. Potter was inspired by a quotation from Ephesians 4:1-16, "The Job of a Church" - to do for Christ; to learn of Him; to be like Him."

Reverend E. R. Stearns, secretary of the New Hampshire Congregational Conference, brought the greetings of the Congregational churches of the state and Dr. Frank G. Woodworth, Pastor Emeritus, offered the communion prayer and took part in this observance, pronouncing the benediction.

The music of the morning included an anthem by the church choir and solos by Mrs. Laurence Soule of Hartford, Connecticut, and Mrs. Shirley Spurr of Melrose, Massachusetts. Mrs. Harold V. Sheahan, the organist, was accompanied in her prelude and on the hymns by Mrs. Flora Anderson of Boston with the violin.

At 4:30 in the afternoon a large company gathered to hear the vesper service. Reverend N. H. Scott of Somersworth, Rev. M. Gerry Plummer of Berwick, and Dr. Woodworth participated in the service. Musical numbers by the choir followed with Mrs. Spurr and Ernest Cook of Portsmouth as soloists. Mrs. Sheahan and Mrs. Anderson supplied organ and violin music.

The outstanding feature of the service was the excellently prepared history of Congregationalism from the early days in the community presented by its writer, Mr. Potter.

The society concluded its centennial observance with the anniversary dinner, attended by approximately 100 people. At 6:30 they passed down the stairs and into the vestry to the strains of a march played by a four-piece orchestra.

The post-prandial exercises were in charge of toastmaster William M. Ames who read telegrams of congratulation from former members of the parish and then called for the reading of letters that had been received. A letter was read from Rev. Frederick Walsh whose boyhood and youth were spent in Somers-

worth, and who mentioned its beneficent influence upon his later career.

Letters were also read from former pastors, Rev. Asa M. Parker of Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts and Rev. Albert C. Fulton of the First Presbyterian Church of Syracuse.

Other speakers of the evening included the Reverend Alexander Sloan of South Berwick, Reverend Louis Purdum of Dover, Reverend Donald Fraser of Rochester, all of whom were introduced by Toastmaster Ames. Mr. Fred K. Wentworth represented the High Street Methodist Episcopal Church and Mr. William C. McCue brought greetings from the Baptist Church and also spoke for Berwick.

Placed upon the platform at the side of the room included a stand made of a part of the case of an old organ installed in the church in 1849. It was loaned by Miss Elizabeth Pope for the occasion as well as copies of some old church manuals - one of 1845, one of 1866, and the old record of the society containing records of its organization and its subsequent meetings.

The orchestra which played through the evening was composed of Miss May Fuller, violin; Dr. H. I. Reed, trombone, Mr. Norton, trumpet; Miss Titus, accompanist.

In 1929 Reverend James Potter resigned to join the Congregational Conference as Assistant Secretary. He had multifarious duties, was minister-at-large for pastorless churches, friend and advisor of home missionaries, and director of promotional work.

Reverend Oviatt Desmond began his work here in 1929, succeeding Mr. Potter. He was a young, inexperienced but conscientious man and Somersworth was his first real experience in the practicalities and complexities of pastoral work. A graduate of the University of Michigan in 1924, he had taught for two years in the Battle Creek, Michigan, High School. He then took his divinity course at Yale, and served as student pastor at the Congregational Church at Roxbury, Connecticut.

It was a difficult year for him for there was a movement arising to join with the Methodist church, and also there was criticism as to the content of some of his youthful sermons.

The following letter of resignation speaks for itself, and attests to the character of a fine young man:

To the Members of the First Congregational Church and Society of Somersworth, New Hampshire.



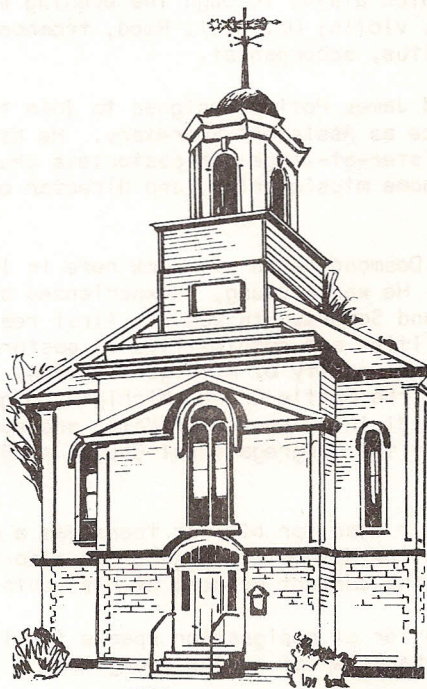
Dear Friends:

For a little over a year I have worked with you as your pastor. In this church I received my ordination to the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus. Through this church I have formed lasting friendships and have been enabled to comfort and strengthen some who were in need.

Now you are to enter a new adventure and I shall watch from a distance, anxious for its success. I gladly resign the pastorate of this church to take effect October first next, as a part of my reasonable service to the cause of Christ, fervently hoping that, joining with other Christians, more effective work may be done here in Somersworth to spread His spirit and His life. I congratulate you on your federation with the Methodist Church of this city and leave with you my earnest hope for your success and larger joy.

(Signed) Oviatt E. Desmond

September 21, 1930



Front of former High Street M. E. Church with vestry added. Now the First Parish United Church of Christ.

# **Chapter VIII**

**DEPRESSION ERA;  
MOVEMENT TOWARD FEDERATION  
1930'S VALIANT EFFORTS  
DURING THE DEPRESSION YEARS**

## Chapter VIII

DEPRESSION ERA:  
MOVEMENT TOWARD FEDERATION  
1930'S VALIANT EFFORTS  
DURING THE DEPRESSION YEARS



On December 31, 1930 the church rolls included only 123 members. Many residents had moved away because of economic conditions in this community. According to church records, expenditures were low indeed, per force of necessity, and already the thought of uniting the Methodist and Congregational Societies had occurred to many minds.

Meanwhile, routine activities such as regional conferences, the World Service League, and attendance at the New Hampshire Conference of Congregational-Christian Churches were carried on.

The foresight of the Reverend Richard Kellogg and his wife, as well as that of the deacons and church committees, resulted in a number of constructive efforts. A junior church was organized under the leadership of Mrs. Kellogg, a Sunday School library was set up, the Christian Endeavor movement was expanded.

The most important development occurring in 1931 was the writing and adoption of the Constitution and By-laws for the Articles of Federation. They were adopted as a whole by a unanimous vote.

In 1932 the Federated Church had a strong Sunday School under the direction of Fred K. Wentworth and H. V. Sheahan and unforgotten names such as Fred Symes, George E. Varney, Roscoe Edgerly, Phil Wentworth, Frank Tibbetts, Maurice Kimball and Ray Wentworth, able business men in the community, lent their talents to the church as a Standing Committee.

In 1933 the Standing Committee consisted of the following: From the Methodist-Episcopal Church - two trustees and two stewards; from the Congregational Church - four deacons; from both churches, the superintendent and assistant superintendent of the Sunday School, the minister ex-officio.

In 1933 it was also further resolved "that a committee of three from each society be appointed by the Standing Committee to consider means of furthering more hearty and definite cooperation, looking toward an early selection of a permanent place of worship, thereby avoiding unnecessary expense and providing for an adequate reconditioning of the finally-selected church edifice and that the committee be requested to make its report at as early a date as possible and that they have authority to call a special meeting of the Federated Church to hear its report, and to take action subject to due ratification of each of the two societies whose interests are so vitally involved." Beulah Winn, Clerk

Also, in the 1933 records are Mr. Kellogg's suggestions concerning the need of more complete church school equipment. Apparently he was a practical man for he pointed out that the vestry should be made more attractive with tables and games for the groups meeting there.

In 1934 the following interesting resolution was adopted:

"Persons who wish to join this church may do so either as Congregationalists or Methodists or members of the Federated Church."

There followed in 1935 an amendment of Article III of the Constitution describing a change in Standing Committee personnel:

"A Standing Committee shall consist of four representatives from the Methodist Society, four representatives from the Congregational Society (instead of four deacons of the Congregational Church), two representatives from the Woman's Society and three members of the Finance Committee."

The Federated Church was fated to continue until 1937. Its next minister was to be a remarkable English gentleman and scholar, Rev. J. T. Cullem Blackmore, a Methodist who came to Somersworth in 1934. Certain insights into his character may be traced in the following report by Mrs. Beulah Winn, given in the church records of that year:

"Mr. Blackmore spoke in humorous vein of his experience in adapting himself to our ways, and congratulated us on the advance made so far. He urged us on to deeper union "to go forward thinking increasingly of the things that unite us rather than those that separate us, to so present to the children growing up in our midst such a concept of religion, God and the church as to win their whole-hearted allegiance thereto....to build up in our midst such a church."



The problems of the Federated Church, however, were soon to come to a climax.

A report given on February 3, 1936 stated that only seventy-five persons contributed to the Methodist and Congregational finances and on an average only fifty persons attended church services. So, it seemed that the group was neither large enough nor strong enough to carry on the denomination's World Service nor benevolent programs nor maintain two church properties.

A series of questions in the form of a straw vote pertained to the following possibilities: (1) only a Methodist church for the federated parish; (2) a Congregational church in a Methodist building; (3) a Methodist church in a Congregational building; (4) continuation of the original agreement (both Congregational and Methodist denominations using both churches).

Mr. Blackmore felt throughout his ministry here that the greatest need of the church was to unite in one building for a church home, especially for the sake of the young people.

Unselfishly, he worked toward the final step of one denomination and one building. Foreseeing that the eventuality would prove to be a choice of the Congregational denomination and the use of the Methodist church building, he asked his conference for a change.

"This condition" reported Mr. Blackmore, "...would give the new union a clean slate to start with." His annual report went on to state that he was happy to have been with the church during its transition and to have given his support and guidance to the cause which he now felt had reached its aim. He closed by encouraging expression of faith in the future. The report was accepted with the exception that if his request to the Conference meant his resignation, that part was not to be accepted.

It was voted that all monies and records of the Federated Church be turned over to the First Parish Church, Congregational.

It was unanimously voted to dissolve the Federated Church.

Efforts were made to keep Mr. Blackmore but the Methodist Conference could not support a change in his denomination, and furthermore, it was felt that he had done more to promote the larger good than he had to support Methodism itself. Thus, the Conference could give him a new position but perhaps without the status of his ministry in Somersworth. Mr. Blackmore decided to go back to England, when after six years' consideration, the church went forward under Congregational

auspices - abiding in the building the Methodists had built years before.

The words of Mr. Blackmore follow:

"The children of Israel did their settling down in the promised land under a new leader, and not under one who had borne the responsibilities of the desert crossing. So, I wish to tell you that I have asked the authorities of the Methodist Conference whereon my pastoral membership is held to grant us a change from here to some other post as soon as it will be conveniently possible to do so."

Among the benefits listed were that there would be no more hesitation in showing devotion to the church building, that alibis for not attending church would be removed, that missions would be aided, that social activities would be easier and strengthened "only having one set of cupboards, drawers, dishes, cutlery, etc."

"May God richly bless the First Parish Church of Somersworth," was his farewell.

Further records of 1937 denote the following vote:

"The First Parish Church, Congregational, will accept into its membership any member of the High Street Methodist Episcopal Church or the Federated Church, who so desire, by notifying the Clerk of the Church to place their names on the church books."

\$400 from each church was designated for repairs to the Methodist building and \$1,161.25 from the Matilda Haines Fund for this purpose.

The Congregational Church building was sold 1937 to Peter M. Gagne and is the present home of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The following Articles of Agreement were approved by the members of the Methodist Episcopal and Congregational Churches:

It is agreed by and between the High Street Methodist Episcopal Church and the High Street Methodist Episcopal Society and the First Congregational Church Society both of Somersworth, New Hampshire, as follows:

The First Congregational Society agrees to admit to its membership all members of the Methodist Episcopal Society and immediately thereafter to reorganize and elect new officers, the new members being fairly represented.

The said First Congregational Society further agrees to



hold its religious services in the High Street Methodist Episcopal Church building and that the Congregational Church building shall be disposed of as the reorganized society may decide.

The First Congregational Church agrees that it shall, after this reorganization be known as the First Parish Church (of Somersworth).

The High Street Methodist Episcopal Society agrees that it will deed to the reorganized First Congregational Society the Methodist Episcopal Church building and lot, and the Methodist Episcopal parsonage and lot.

The parsonage and land to be the property of the First Congregational Society to be held in trust.

The J. N. Haines S.S. Fund of \$500 to be given to the First Congregational Society, the income to be used for the First Parish Church Sunday School.

It is agreed that all religious services shall be under the auspices of the Congregational Church.

It is agreed that the By-laws of the First Congregational Society shall be amended to provide for these acts.

It is further agreed by the two Societies aforesaid that all outstanding debts, and all bills incurred in the reorganization shall be met by the several societies. This is to insure that the reorganized First Congregational Society shall begin free of all debt.

The above agreement reached by a joint committee consisting of

Javan M. Russell  
Theodate Bates  
Phil O. Wentworth  
John Howker

Leola Pepler, in an article written for the Somersworth Free Press November 15, 1962 describes the appearance of the First Parish Church at the time of the merger. With her permission, it is quoted in part herewith:

"As you climb the stairs to the sanctuary, you notice the beautiful black walnut hand rails and become aware of the richness of the decor.

In the sanctuary there are pews of black walnut and on each side of the church the waved paneling reflects the varicolored light from the memorial art glass windows.

At the right front, the baptismal font of highly polished marble, in memoriam of Mary A. Legro, is inscribed "One Lord-One Faith-One Baptism."

Recently a beautiful, handwrought reading desk, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Phil O. Wentworth, Jr., made by Mr. Wentworth, has been placed at the left of the church; this, with its tiny carved cross, to hold the book "Our Abiding Memorials of First Parish Church".

Two large, wood mounted candelabra grace the church; one placed there by the Guild of the Methodist Church and the other by the Amici Club of the Congregational Church, "In Memoriam" of members who have gone to their reward.

The names on the windows are those who belong to the past and gave their time and substance to the building of this place of worship. As you start at the vestibule of the church these are the names as inscribed at the base of the windows: In Memoriam: Benjamin F. B. Plummer; Aaron D. Faunce; James A. Winn; David L. Hodgdon; Moses Bates and Eliza P. Bates; George W. Wendell; Harriet Bates Legro Perkins; John Wesley Bates; Jesse Robinson Horne; John Sherburne Haines; James Horne and Eliza C. Horne; Samuel Chadbourne and Sophronia W. Chadbourne and Ebenezer Worster.

I like to call these windows

A Sermon on the Wall

Three lofty windows  
Grace our southern wall.  
That there are several others  
Matters not at all.

For these three windows  
Reflect the morning sun  
That makes them glow like jewels  
Before the day is done.

On one, the purple grapes  
Encircled by the vine  
Remind us of the Supper  
The broken bread and wine.

The compass and the square  
Above the grapes are seen,  
A symbol full of meaning  
On which strong men have lien.

The second leaded window  
Is graced with lillies white,  
A resurrection promise  
To keep our hearts alight.

The shameful cross is here  
Above the lillies tall,  
On which our dear loved Master  
Died to save us, one and all.

The last of windows three  
Is bright with poppies red  
A symbol of life eternal  
For this our Saviour bled.

The crown above the poppies  
Is for a consecrated life  
To praise our Lord and Master  
With Love surmounting Strife."

A Glimpse of the World

Three lofty windows  
Grace out southern walls,  
That there are several others  
Matters not at all.

For these three windows  
Reflect the morning sun  
That makes them glow like jewels  
Bathed the day is done.

On one, the purple grapes  
Coolled by the vine  
Lined up of the bunch  
The broken bread and wine.

The compass and the square  
Above the grapes are seen,  
A symbol full of meaning,  
On which strong men have been.

The second lofty window  
Is graced with little white  
A resurrection banner  
To keep our hearts bright.

The third, the most is bare  
Above the little wall,  
On which our dear Lord Jesus  
Died to save us, and now sits.

The last of windows three  
Is bright with golden rods,  
A symbol of life eternal,  
For this our Savior died.

The crown above the grapes  
Is for a consecrated life  
To praise our Lord and Father  
With love unending strife.



## **Chapter IX**

**CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH RE-ESTABLISHED**

## Chapter IX

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH RE-ESTABLISHED

The Carroll-Strafford Association convened March 11, 1938 in Ecclesiastical Council, and installed the Reverend Arthur J. Snow as pastor of this church. Preceding the installation, at a special meeting after church on March 6, 1938, the Reverend Alice B. Snow was recommended for membership by the Congregational Church in Kensington, and the Reverend Arthur J. Snow was dismissed from the First Congregational Church of Kingston, New Hampshire for fellowship in the First Parish Church.

Thus began the service of a gifted couple to the church and community. It was to last from 1938-1942. Of similar backgrounds, educationally and theologically, they lent their talents to the strengthening of the work of the church. Their influence was strongly felt in the Sunday School, in all church organizations, in the New Hampshire Congregational Conference, and in personal friendships throughout the parish. Church membership improved. On occasion, Mrs. Snow would preach, and she was a personality, dynamic and loving. Human interest was added when their son, George Arthur Snow, was born and then baptized by the Reverend Vaughan Dabney of Andover-Newton Seminary on March 16, 1940.

The time of Reverend Snow's resignation occurred during World War II when he was called to the assistant ministry of the Plymouth Church in Minneapolis.

Parts of his letter of resignation are quoted, as follows:

"...A church which is appreciative of every effort a minister or his wife makes, a church which is fundamentally striving to be Christian in every way, makes any minister's load easy. Throughout my ministry here I have found this to be that type of church. ...It has been a happy relationship, and I have rejoiced in this happiness."

In September 1942, Mr. Snow left here for the Plymouth Church, Minneapolis. Thereafter, he served in Stoneham, Massachusetts, and in Florida, achieving success in all his pastorates. His final pastorate was at Beloit, Wisconsin at the Second Congregational Church.

On March 23, 1966 he was tragically killed in an automobile accident. Services were held at Beloit, Wisconsin, and later at Stoneham, Massachusetts.

Mr. Snow is survived by his wife and two sons, George Arthur and John. He was buried in Lynnfield, Massachusetts.

The Snows were the first Congregational ministers to come to the reorganized First Parish Church after the federation was dissolved and the Congregational and Methodist Churches united as Congregationalist in the Methodist building.

Reports left by the Reverend Arthur J. Snow in 1938 and 1939 afford special insights into his life and character, as well as church activities at that time. His efforts were oriented especially to young people although this sociable young man and his wife reached out in friendliness and helpfulness to all who needed their assistance.

Living here in a relatively "unpressured" period, when the speed mania had not gripped the American people in all areas, he managed, in his first year, to make 273 parish calls. A stated ambition was that of making 1,000 parish visitations, a goal achieved in 1938.

He kept careful records of the books he read; for example, in one year they numbered 101; in another, 122. Time spent in preparation of sermons and in writing letters relative to parish concerns, was also accounted for. Four hours a day was spent in his study, and this was routine.

Discussion groups were of great interest to him. Thus, he sponsored a Fireside Club for young adults, for he stated that in the Thought Life of young people rests the future of the world. Then, he sponsored a group of Crusaders from the grammar school who met once a week to hear stories about missionaries. The Christian Endeavor met every Sunday night, average attendance twenty persons. Its purpose was stated as follows: "The discussions are exclusively in some way related to the subject of religious living and a better integrated life." This group had two basketball teams (boys and girls) and put on a play.

Methodical and well-organized, he apparently accomplished a phenomenal amount of work with the help of his wife, Alice. An attractive woman, she was, as previously stated, also an



ordained minister and endowed with superior intellectual gifts. The spotlight, however, she invariably turned on her husband.

The Snows were young, filled with enthusiasm, and fired with idealism. Their spirit became infectious. The average church attendance in 1937 was 108, and in 1938, 103. Relative to the matter of church attendance, he commented, "Roger Babson, the eminent statistician has figured that church attendance in the average Congregational church is only 35% of its membership, and 65% of that membership is in new churches where dead wood has not accumulated." Mr. Snow added, "The fact that we have an average nearly twice as good as that of the average church is very gratifying."

A great man for statistics, he made an exhaustive study of the parish, figuring out just how many could be expected to attend church, what should be the active membership of the Women's Society, and the potential membership of the Men's Club. In this way, he entreated the parishioners to get busy. -- He made a numerical breakdown of children and adolescents in the parish, and made it his aim that some type of social organization be provided for each age group.

During his ministry here he acted as chairman of the World Friendship Committee of the Carroll-Strafford Association of Congregational Churches, and was a member of the Resolutions Committee of the State Conference.

In summary, he stated, "It is your pastor's opinion that the work of the minister divides itself into four natural groupings: his pastoral work or calling, his study, his effort for the larger fellowship of churches, and his work with the organizations of the church."

There were, in Mr. Snow's time, 495 members of the parish; of these, 212 were women and 157, men.

It was the good fortune of the church that the Reverend Theodore Hadley agreed to come to Somersworth. Although records of specific happenings during his pastorate are, unfortunately, incomplete, the memory of a thoroughly good, unselfish man remains in the hearts of all who were privileged to know him. Most helpful, too, was Mrs. Hadley who worked ceaselessly in the church and the New Hampshire Conference.

It has been recorded that on the first Children's Day on June 13, 1943, thirteen children were baptized and seventeen more reported at the end of the year. This pattern was to continue throughout his ministry. Church membership steadily increased under his leadership.

At an annual meeting held January 1947 Mr. Hadley read "A

Short History of Methodism in Somersworth" and presented to the church the old communion sets, a corner cabinet and etchings of the First Congregational and High Street Methodist Churches, on behalf of a committee comprised of Theodate Bates, Edith L. Russell, Alice Horne Wentworth and Roscoe G. Edgerly, descendants of charter members Dudley Wiggin, Moses Bates, John Horne and Thomas T. Edgerly of early Methodism in Somersworth.

When the Methodist Society disbanded in 1936 to affiliate with the First Parish Church, Congregational, a sum of money had been set aside to provide a suitable container in which the communion sets of the old Methodist Society might be preserved. The pewter set dates from the beginning, 1828; a silver service not now in existence was used until 1877 when another silver service came into use, and is now preserved. The latter service gave way to individual cups about 1894.

The etchings were the work of Jeannette Stewart, daughter of John and Katherine Stewart, former members of the Second Church of Methodism in the village of Great Falls known as the Main Street Methodist Church.

Upon motion made by H. V. Sheahan these gifts were gratefully accepted and the history spread on the church records, as follows:

"The first sermon ever preached by a Methodist in what is now the city of Somersworth was in 1817 by Reverend John Lord in the house of Mr. Gershom Horne. In 1825 the first regular Methodist preaching was begun in this village." Meetings were held in an "unfinished house".

In September 1828 a church building was completed and then dedicated by the Reverend Stephen Martindale of Boston. The legal society was known as "The Great Falls Methodist Society".

In 1851 a second church was established on Main Street and the original society was henceforth known as the High Street Methodist Episcopal Church. During the brief life of this second church, Reverend R. M. Sawyer served for a while.

In 1877 excavations were made around the High Street Church; the original structure was brought forward and a vestry provided while the "audience" room was greatly improved with black walnut fittings and finely frescoed.

The first members of the Methodist Church were: Alfred French, Charles Lewis, Moses Bates, David Miner, Simon Hall, Bartlett Hall, Christopher C. Wolcott, John G. Chase, Thomas T. Edgerly, John Horne and George W. Edgerly.



Ted Hadley (as he affectionately became known) worked and lived among Somersworth parishioners from 1943-1947.

He resigned for one reason alone - he thought he could better serve somewhere else. His letter of resignation is presented in its entirety as being typical of his life and character:

"To the First Parish Church of Somersworth:

I have called this meeting of the church to present formally my resignation as pastor. It is a decision which has been thoughtfully considered and was not easy to make. There come times, however, when one has to choose between the easy and the harder way, between what might ordinarily do, and what ought to be done. This is such a time.

I have received a call to the churches of Gilsum, Sullivan and East Sullivan, New Hampshire and the call includes the responsibility for assuming the regional ministry in that area. I might add that the area I shall serve embodies some 125 square miles in which some 1,400 people are living, and in that area there has been no resident minister for over a year. It is an area sorely in need of leadership.

Three considerations have governed my decision. First, there is obvious need to be met; second, our First Parish Church is a strong and onward moving organization, and you will have no difficulty in obtaining another pastor; third, I have long thought and preached that our church can be no stronger than the individual churches in rural areas. I am now called to practice what I have been preaching, and I hope it may be possible to do something in a real way about meeting the spiritual need in the rural areas of our state.

For these reasons, I therefore tender my resignation to take effect following the morning service on Sunday, December 28, 1947. I think you will all understand the affection I have for this church even though I leave it, and I hope your prayers and good will go with Mrs. Hadley and me as we start upon this new adventure.

Faithfully yours,  
Theodore Hadley"

Mr. Sheahan expressed the deep regret felt by all in the church, but stated that in view of the circumstances, he could not be asked to stay. He, therefore, made a motion to accept the resignation. It was seconded, and by vote of the church, accepted.

Mr. Hadley continued his good works throughout his lifetime, moving from church to church as the need arose, finally retir-

ing to Vermont.

The report of the Annual Meeting held January 16, 1948 noted that the Reverend Charles Pendleton had expressed his pleasure in being chosen as a minister of this church. This forward-looking, liberal-minded young man and his wife soon made friends with the congregation.

Mr. Pendleton's ministry in Somersworth, though brief, was effective, his sermons succinct yet potent, and even his annual report was one page in length.

For example, in his 1949 report he asked his parishioners to test their spiritual gains in the year that had passed by this criterion: "Have you achieved anything for the Kingdom of God?"

"We set for our yearly objective the establishment of our lives in brotherly love. Let us continue to strive to grow for there is room to grow and it would be good to enter the second half of the 20th century with bigness of heart."

He then followed with specific recommendations that the Prudential Committee be increased; that more money be spent for music and missions, and for the payment of the organist and janitor. He further suggested that a paid nursery attendant would be helpful to parents wishing to attend Sunday services.

The closing statement follows: "I am delivering to you a copy of the By-laws of this church. When enough of you call upon me to do further work on it, I will be happy to serve you, but until that time I ask to be relieved of responsibility for it."

During his pastorate the First Parish Church was incorporated (1949). As an incorporated body under the laws of the State of New Hampshire, the church would manage its own affairs.

It was further decided that the New Hampshire Congregational Christian Conference would be trustees of all endowment funds of the church and the principal put into the hands of the Conference. A report concerning the same was to be given at each annual meeting.

In 1949 the former Hyde home at 25 Prospect Street was left to be used as a parsonage by the late Miss Maude Hyde, daughter of former pastor, Reverend Henry Hyde.

Occupancy of the home as a parsonage became possible when the First Parish Church members were informed that the Methodist Conference had relinquished all claims to the parsonage on Highland Street. The parsonage had become the property of the church in 1937 when Methodists and Congregationalists combined under provisions of a deed which specified that it be used as



a parsonage for fifteen years. Happily, the Methodist Conference had agreed to waive the fifteen-year provision which would not have expired until 1952, and executed a quit claim deed on the parsonage. Plans called for the sale of the former parsonage and the moving of the pastor and family into the new parsonage.

On November 19, 1950 a special meeting of the church was called to release the Reverend Charles L. Pendleton from his duties in this pastorate. He left Somersworth to become minister of the Congregational Church at Bethel, Maine.

The Pulpit Committee on April 15, 1951 voted to extend to Reverend John H. Olsen of the United Parish Church of Fort Fairfield, Maine an invitation to be pastor and teacher of the church.

An amendment to the by-laws, Section I, Item (F), voted on at the annual meeting, January 11, 1952, was changed to read:

"Eight deacons, two to be elected annually for a term of four years shall replace the present board of deacons as follows: the two members of the present board having the longest term of service shall be replaced at the annual meeting after the passage of this amendment and the same procedure shall be followed each year until the deacons are all on a four-year elective basis."

At this time, the following organizations were active: the World Service Committee, the Music Committee, the Women's Society, a committee on Religious Education, and the Prudential Committee.

During his brief tenure, Mr. Olsen maintained the status quo, and expressed appreciation to his parishioners who, in all areas, helped him to do so.

A kindly man, this attitude was reflected in his 1952 report which was filled with such expressions as: "It has been a blessing to your pastor to note..." "Our Children's Day service was an especially happy time for your pastor"... "It was a privilege of your pastor to have baptized nine children" ... "The Laymen's Sunday Service was a blessing to all"... "Our men-folk show willingness of heart"... "It was my privilege to offer invocations at a Memorial Day Service, a Business and Professional Women's Club Meeting, and at the basketball banquet for our victorious high school team". He also expressed "deep feelings of gratitude" to the organist, choir director, the choir, officers and teachers of the Sunday School, officers of various organizations, the Prudential Committee, and the church committees who kept the parsonage in good repair."

His hopes for 1952 were for increased attendance at Sunday Morning Service, maintenance of benevolences, loyalty of the officers, teachers and pupils in Sunday School, accomplishment of some repairs in the church plant, and a closer relationship between the pastor and various organizations in the church. The major emphasis was on the support of the Christian World Mission.

Special honor was done to Mr. William M. Ames and Mr. Phil O. Wentworth in 1952. They were made honorary deacons in deference to their long and faithful service to the church.

On February 8, 1953 Reverend John Olsen resigned from the church, and on February 16 his resignation was accepted.

On February 16, 1953 it was voted that future ministers give formal reports to their activities in behalf of the church, quarterly reports to the Standing Committee, and that one member of the committee give a report of the good and not so good reports of his work during a three-month period. It was voted to adopt this method as a possible way of improving church-minister relationships.

On October 18, 1953 letters of transfer were granted to Reverend and Mrs. John Olsen to the Piermont Congregational Church, Piermont, New Hampshire.

A formal installation service held January 10, 1954 seemed to augur well for the First Parish Church pastorate of the Reverend Austin W. Guild. It was conducted by the Carroll-Strafford Association of the New Hampshire Congregational-Christian Conference.

Preceding the ceremonies, a supper was sponsored by the Amici, the Service Unit and the Progressive Clubs. Delegates from various churches in the area were guests at this largely attended gathering.

The Reverend Theodore Hadley was welcomed back to preach the Installation sermon; Reverend Ralph S. Huffer, Reverend Lewis R. Chase, Reverend Dwight H. McMahon, Reverend Floyd H. Kinsley all took part in the evening program. Mrs. Edith E. Guild, the minister's wife, who had a beautiful voice, sang "How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings".

The church records at the beginning of Mr. Guild's ministry, and for a year thereafter, indicate an increase in church membership and effective work done by various committees and organizations.

On January 14, 1955 the following notation was added to the records:

"Reverend Guild extended thanks to the many officers and societies, church school leaders, heads of scouts and heads of various departments who have helped him during these fifteen months. There was a rising vote of thanks for Reverend and Mrs. Guild."

In another year, however, the picture of a once happily united church was obscured by clouds of dissension that were soon to burst into a storm. Within the church, there was a serious loss of support and income. At the annual meeting on January 13, 1956, it was moved that "the service of the present minister be terminated immediately with salary to continue until February 29, 1956".

The attending group voted by Australian ballot on the question. The number of ballots cast was 157; to dismiss 73, to retain 82, blank ballots 2. That the motion was lost by only nine votes indicated the strong division of opinion. Longtime friends took issue with one another on the vital question concerning the minister. The storm was not to go away.

On March 4, 1956 at a meeting following the morning worship service, the Reverend Austin W. Guild read his letter of resignation. A motion was made and seconded to accept the resignation with regret, but the motion was ruled as being out of order. It was to be voted upon finally at a special meeting to be held March 9, 1956 at 7:30 p.m.

At that time Mr. Guild's letter was again read by the moderator. "The terms of the resignation are to be settled by the Prudential Committee and to be fair in all respects" was an answer given in response to an inquiry. Then, after discussion by the group, unanimous acceptance of the resignation was recorded.

A supply minister was to preach on the following Sunday and thereafter until a new minister would be chosen.





# **Chapter X**

**UNITY IN THE CHURCH**

**THE FIRST PARISH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

## Chapter X

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The Reverend John E. Nelson with his record of a seven-year outstanding ministry at Island Falls, Maine was unanimously chosen as the next minister. He had been highly recommended by the Maine Conference where he had served as a Director, and by Dr. Frederick Alden, Conference Minister of the New Hampshire Conference. The latter greatly desired that Mr. Nelson come to Somersworth, believing that he would bring peace to the troubled church and wise direction to its activities. The fact that he has remained here for nearly a quarter of a century speaks for itself, and of the cooperation and mutual respect existent between the minister and his parishioners.

Mr. Nelson accepted the call to minister to the Somersworth church October 15, 1956, and his formal installation service occurred on February 24, 1957, upon recommendation of the Pulpit Committee and by authority and consent of the congregation. The Prayer of Installation was offered by Reverend Warren Palmer, Past President of the Maine Conference; the Sermon of Installation by Dr. Frederick W. Alden, Minister of the New Hampshire Conference; the Charge to the Minister and Congregation by the Reverend Marshall Stevenson, New Hampshire Life Minister; New Hampshire Greetings by the Reverend Floyd Kinsley, Moderator of the Carroll-Strafford Association; and Somersworth-Berwick Greetings by the Reverend Paul Youngholm of the Berwick United Methodist Church. The Minister's Acceptance and Charge to the Staff was given by the Reverend John E. Nelson who also pronounced the Benediction.

A career then began in a community which, after the turn of the century, had come to have a Roman Catholic majority. He had come to a church that had threatened to be a "house divided". Believing strongly in Ecumenism, he made friends among all other groups, both Catholic and Protestant, resulting in influence that has been widespread. Believing also in Peace, Peace triumphed in the church entrusted to his leadership.



The greatest change occurring in his first year was a contemplated merger that was later to become the United Church of Christ. The movement had been steadily growing that in union, not diversity, lay the source of greater effectiveness and strength. To this point of view church leaders and the new minister subscribed. It was also felt that the Congregational designation and heritage must be cherished although broadened philosophically. To educate parishioners concerning a rapidly growing trend away from a narrow parochialism was the task ahead; to discover, examine, and reconcile differing viewpoints, the challenge. The process began in Somersworth in 1957.

After years of study and prayer a special meeting was called on Sunday, April 9, 1961 following the morning service of worship. The following resolution was acted upon: (There were 70 for the resolution and 1 against).

"Whereas the vote of the church has been requested as the next legal act in the plans to merge with the United Church of Christ; therefore, be it resolved that the First Parish Congregational Church of Somersworth, New Hampshire, approve the Constitution of the United Church of Christ provided that Article IV, Paragraph 21, is held forever inviolate and unamendable making this church a member of the United Church of Christ.

#### Article IV - Paragraph 21

"The autonomy of the local church is inherent and modifiable only by its own action - nothing in this Constitution and the By-Laws of the United Church of Christ shall destroy or limit the right of each local church to continue to operate in the way customary to it; nor shall be construed as giving to the General Synod, or to any conference or association now or at any future time, the power to abridge or impair the autonomy of any local church in the management of its own affairs, which affairs include the right to retain or adopt its own methods of organization, worship or education, to retain and secure its own charter and name; to adopt its own constitution and by-laws; to formulate its own covenants and confession of faith; to admit members in its own way and to provide for their discipline and dismissal; to call or dismiss its pastor by such procedure as it shall determine; to acquire, own, manage, and dispose of property and funds; to control its own benevolences, and to withdraw by its own decision from the United Church of Christ at any time without forfeiture of ownership or control of any real or personal property owned by it."

The name of the church affiliated with the United Church of Christ is decided by the church itself. The decision made was this:



## The First Parish, United Church of Christ (Congregational)

During the 1960's there was a continued emphasis and advancement in the area of Christian Education, and a decision was made to employ a director, as well as to assume a goal of \$1,816 for the National Christian Higher Education Fund. Mrs. Robert Garneau became the church's first Director of Christian Education.

As for Adult Education, a good start was made in building an up-to-date reference library which later was to be dedicated to the memory of Harold V. Sheahan, a long-time leader in the church.

Exemplifying the highest values found in a Christian home, community and church were Diane Miller, Linda Emerson and Nancy Taylor, who received the Girl Scout God and Community Award at a special service attended by visiting troop and scouting executives from Maine and New Hampshire. They were the first in the history of Georgeanna Council, embracing all of York County, Maine and Somersworth, New Hampshire, to receive this award.

At a special church meeting held April 5, 1961 it was voted to acquire the Free Press building next to the church property of 45 High Street for further expansion of church facilities. Its renovation during 1962 took place under the direction of Robert Crichton and Mark Taylor, assisted by members of the Churchmen's Fellowship. This building housed offices for the minister and the Christian Education Director, including a small auditorium and five classrooms. The front and side of the building were completely remodeled, greatly adding to the appearance.

A Memorial Fund for Christian Education was established at this time as a result of spontaneous action of friends of Miss Theodate Bates. At the time of her death, they expressed the wish to establish a continuing memorial.

In 1961 the Prudential Committee outlined the condition and future prospects of the parsonage property after consulting with qualified architects, Willis Littlefield of Dover, who had made a careful survey.

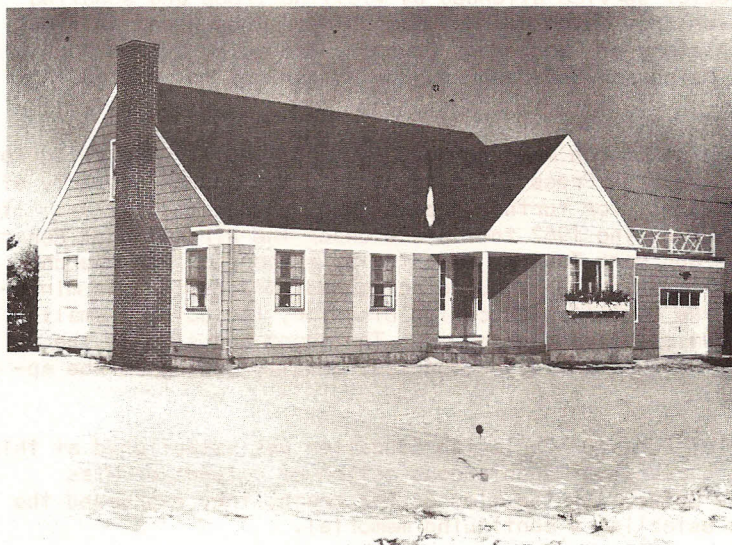
Another special business meeting was called for Friday, May 18, 1962 at 7:30 p.m. to hear the report of the Building Committee and act on recommendations of the Standing Committee relative to church properties. The recommendations follow:

1. To construct a new Hyde Parsonage
2. Said building to be constructed on Glenview Road, Somersworth

3. Said parsonage to be in accordance with bids received by the Building Committee  
     Low bidder - E. Raymond Ricker  
     Ground work - Maurice Hatfield
4. That the Prudential Committee be empowered to make all contracts and financial arrangements necessary to carry out the above in the name of the First Parish Church, Congregational, of Somersworth.
5. That it be further empowered to appoint committees to assist as may be necessary.

Recommendations were accepted as read and motion carried by a standing vote.

The new parsonage was completed, and the Parsonage Family moved into their new home on December 12th in time for Christmas, 1962. The dedication was to occur later.



New Hyde Parsonage 1963

At the recommendation of the minister, a committee was appointed to study the by-laws of the church with the objective of updating them, if necessary, and also of evaluating their effectiveness.

Mr. Nelson also recommended that the Board of Deaconesses should be empowered to carry on their work, not just on a yearly basis, but to continue it in years to come. Concerning their work, he said, "We have had ladies serving the church in



much the same capacity as deaconesses, parish callers, Sunshine Committee, etc., but have not seen fit to raise them to the position of deaconesses. It would seem, in view of the exemplary service these ladies have rendered, that this action is overdue."

The dedication of the new Hyde Parsonage on Glenview Road took place on Sunday, May 26, 1963 at 3 p.m. At that time Reverend and Mrs. Nelson held an informal Open House at their seven-room Cape Cod style home.

Reverend Dr. Everett F. Barrows, Minister of the New Hampshire Congregational Conference, offered the Dedication Prayer. Phil O. Wentworth, Jr., representing the Prudential Committee of the church, presented Deacon Chester H. Smith, representing the Board of Deacons, with the keys to the new parsonage.

"The newness will wear off, but it will be enriched over the years as ministers enrich this house as they serve the parish," said Reverend Nelson during the outdoor ceremonies.

Present were many members representing various committees and organizations.

Mrs. Leola Pepler wrote a special commentary for the occasion, giving a history of Methodist and Congregational parsonages, citing the will of Miss Maude Hyde that made possible the Hyde Parsonage. In closing, she added:

"There could be listed scores of people, all of whom contributed with money and prayer to build this house and gird it with faith and love. This dwelling has been built by hands, many of them working together. It now becomes our privilege to maintain the property that it may ever be a symbol of our love and respect for the church universal; the church, which, with our faith and prayers, will last as long as time itself."

From 1961 through 1965 the church initiated a \$40,000 major improvement program. It included the following accomplishments: New front entrance; repairs to the old Hyde Parsonage; purchase of the Christian Education Building; building the new Hyde Parsonage; new ceilings and painting of the vestry; repairs to roof and new flashing; painting, repair and construction of classrooms in the Christian Education Building; new oil tanks; painting of main church building.

In May of 1966 Reverend Nelson served as Chaplain for the sessions of the Annual Meeting of the New Hampshire Conference at the Pembroke Conference Center - a richly rewarding experience.

Quoting from the Minister's Report of 1967 are certain significant passages:

..."In a world so full of need, perhaps we have given a disproportionate amount of time to church business and the keeping of church machinery well oiled and running. I suggest we may have been too busy to hear or answer some of our neighbors' needs. If this is true, I am sure it was through carelessness and thoughtlessness, and not by serious intent."

..."I suggest that we seek to further develop and expand - beginning with education the benevolent program of our church....that we give serious consideration to the "Breakthrough 1968" program of our denomination and that the Standing Committee after serious consideration establish a Welfare Services Committee within our church that we may speak to some of the needs of our community.

"It occurs to me that at this time in the life of our church a committee for long-range planning could be desirable. ... If the members of the church were to establish such a committee it no doubt could begin its work using our biennial study theme - "The Local Church in God's Mission."

..."I commend all members of the "official" family of the church for the effort they have expended during the past year.

..."It was a great education in the life and work of the larger fellowship of the church for Mrs. Nelson and me to visit Latin America last spring. It is hoped that we have helped to educate others in the mission of the church as we have shared our experience with many church groups in the state."

The planting of shrubbery in front of the Christian Education Building and the purchase of additional hymnals were memorials to John Parsons, Esq., a member of Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Parish, who made a generous bequest to the First Parish Church. He believed strongly in ecumenism and the power of all religions for the betterment of life.

1969 was indeed the year of the ecumenical breakthrough in Somersworth-Berwick. The first Protestant-Roman Catholic service of worship ever held in the city was in the First Parish Church when Reverend F. Lionel Boulay of St. Martin Church gave the sermon. Reverend Mr. Nelson, in turn became the first Protestant minister ever invited to preach in a Roman Catholic Church; he occupied the pulpit at St. Martin. There followed a Layman's Council Communion Breakfast held at the suggestion of the First Parish Churchmen's Fellowship



when over 200 men gathered for that occasion in the high school gym. In the fall of that year, St. Martin Church was the site of a fourth ecumenical gathering when a combined Thanksgiving service made the season more meaningful. Next, Reverend Nelson, speaking in English, became the first Protestant clergyman to address the Holy Name Society of St. Martin.

Mr. Nelson has considered these happenings to be the most highly significant in the entire religious life of this community.

In addition to these activities, the Churchmen's Fellowship sponsored the first Somersworth-Berwick Ecumenical Communion Breakfast. Men from all the local churches were invited. Reverend Father Polan of the Catholic Seminary of Jaffrey was the speaker. All of these activities heralded a new spirit to begin a new decade.

A new plan of informal early morning summer worship began in 1970 and has continued successfully to this time.

Commemorating the Easter season, a Sunrise Service was conducted on April 22, 1973 at 6:30 a.m. by members of the Youth Fellowship overlooking the pond in front of Janco Sales in Rollinsford.

The extensive work done by the Christian Education Committee continued with a Spring Cleanup Day, a Mid-Lent Family Night, distribution of palms, a food sale, Youth Sunday, a Tupperware party, a week-long cooperative vacation school held at the Berwick Methodist Church, a summer film festival, a picnic and outing, a Christmas party, several staff breakfasts, in addition to regular Sunday instruction.

This brief account in no way has done justice to the superb effort of Mrs. Robert Garneau in the area of Christian Education and her helpers as well, but was submitted as being merely typical of work going on all the time.

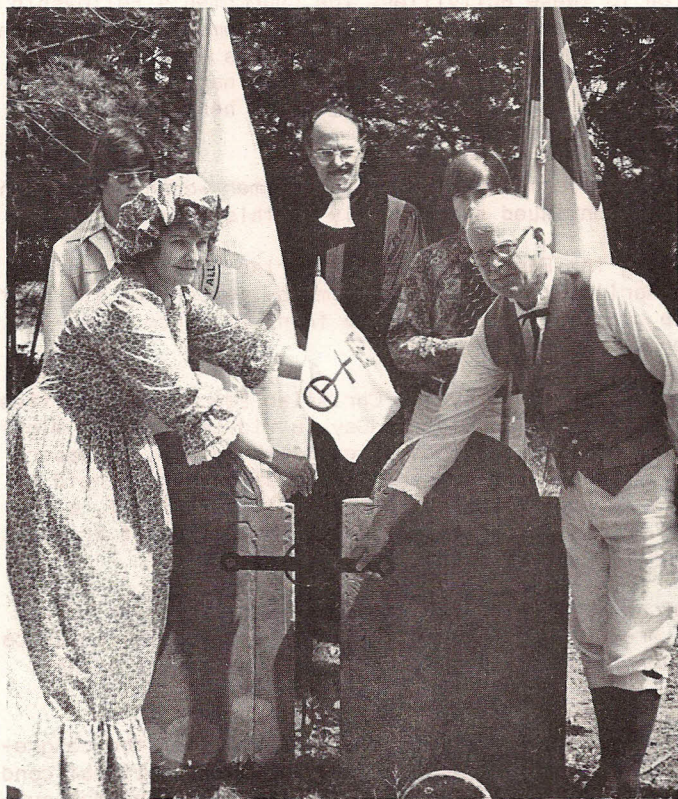
The Minister's Report of 1974 gave evidence that the congregation had not, despite discouraging world and national conditions, been weary in well doing. He cited the generous outpouring of money for victims of the Honduran hurricane, cooperation in maintaining the physical facilities of the church, and generous memorial gifts.

He ended by saying,

"We can respond by helping others to respond to His love and care. We do something to every person we meet. We leave the impression of being honest or dishonest, fair

or unfair, courteous or discourteous, bright or dull, loyal or disloyal. All day we are doing something to someone for good or evil...He who stands for justice, honor and fair play will influence someone who is wavering and leaning on the other. So, let us not grow weary in well doing. Each day in His service is an opportunity to witness. It is a "time to rejoice".

There was extensive planning for the Nation's Bicentennial with appropriate emphasis upon the Congregational heritage and its place in the national and local scene.



Rededication of the Olde Parish Burial Ground 1976  
(l to r.) Lincoln Thyng, Eleanore Janetos, Rev. Nelson,  
Daniel Allyn, Phil Wentworth

On October 5, 1975 there was held an anniversary service complete with tythingman, beadle, drummer and a period-dressed congregation. Following the service came the old-time "nooning". It was held in the vestry when box lunches and a social hour were enjoyed.



In the year 1976, a different historical display was presented each month. A service honoring the memory of the first minister and settlers of the parish was held. The original First Parish burial ground, now in Rollinsford, was visited and a permanent marker placed in front of the gravestone of Reverend Pike. At the re-dedication of the Horne burying ground, at the rear of the present church building, the minister gave the Invocation as well as the Re-dedication Prayer.

Still another Bicentennial project was that of aiding our predominantly black colleges. These colleges have awarded degrees to over 25,000 men and women, chiefly blacks. The project took the form of the 17/76 Achievement Fund and consisted of a campaign to raise 13-17 million dollars by the denomination to help six affiliated colleges and several overseas schools, and to establish a scholarship fund for disadvantaged youth in our own state.

The First Parish Church accepted a goal of \$2,700 for which pledges were received as a part of its Bicentennial observance. This goal was generously over-subscribed. Reverend Nelson, on behalf of the New Hampshire Conference, visited many churches explaining the fund and its need and urging support by the churches.

On May 2, 1976 a special church meeting was held in the vestry. The Prudential Committee gave its report and after a period of questioning, the group voted to employ the architect firm of Philip Tamberling of Rye to present plans for possible renovation of the church building. The question of repairs and renovation had been previously considered at the Annual Meeting, followed by several others throughout the year.

"Should there be church renovation or building?" became a question asked with increasing frequency during 1976. Accordingly, the Prudential Committee appointed a committee representing the Women's Fellowship, Christian Education Department, Deacons and Deaconesses, Minister, and the membership at-large to obtain financial estimates from architects experienced in church renovation.

Proposals were studied, all of which had very high cost estimates. The year 1977 began with three sets of plans to be evaluated. The costs ranged from \$220,000 for the most ambitious plan to \$69,988 for a plan that did not meet the needs of the church.

On June 8, 1977 a special church meeting was called, at which time it was decided by a majority vote that the Prudential Committee continue to explore the avenue of new construction rather than that of renovation.

A Building Site Committee was formed and the long search for possible sites and sufficient land began. Late in the year the decision was made to purchase a four and a half acre lot on West High Street. This is to be the site of the First Parish Church of TOMORROW.



## Commentary

by

David G. Eastman, M. D.  
Past Deacon and Member of the  
Prudential Committee

The ministry of the Reverend John E. Nelson is the longest in the first 250 years of history of our church with the exception of that of the Reverend James Pike. It is interesting to note that the two longest pastorates occurred at the beginning and end of this period of church history and that both Reverend Pike and Reverend Nelson were natives of Newbury-Newburyport, Massachusetts.

His was to be the challenge of meeting problems of the turbulent 1960's and 1970's, of leading a movement in joining the Congregational Church to the United Church of Christ, of furthering the building of the Hyde Parsonage in a new location, of laying the groundwork for a future new church home on West High Street and, above all else, of reuniting the church family.

In addition to preaching sermons, intellectual in content, yet meeting the needs of all parishioners, he has carried out the larger, personal ministry with singular effectiveness, giving countless hours to counseling, not only to his own parishioners but to all who have called upon him for help.

His wife, Josephine, has ably assisted him. There is an awareness of her gracious personality on the part of all who know her. To this quality of a loving inner spirit are added the business acumen and strong secretarial skills that she, as a graduate of Burdett College, has given to the First Parish Church unceasingly and most generously.

Our minister, as a public-spirited citizen, has for two terms been a Trustee of the Somersworth Public Library. He has also served as Charter Secretary of the Somersworth Rotary Club and is now its President.

Having known Reverend Nelson for over twenty years, as preacher, friend, and co-worker in Congregational circles, it is my privilege to state in this, our church history, that he is held in high regard and deep affection, and to add on behalf of his parishioners that the Biblical quotation, "Rich in good works", 1 Timothy 12, is to him truly applicable.

As a church leader, he has been recognized through the New Hampshire Conference, having been a Trustee for two terms, and also its Chaplain and Moderator. He has also served the Carroll-Strafford Association of Ministers and Churches of the United Church of Christ as a member of the Executive Board, has been a member of all committees, and held all offices with the exception of Scribe.

## Acknowledgements

For the preservation and interpretation of invaluable historical data, we are grateful to the memory of the Honorable Christopher H. Wells, editor of the Somersworth Free Press, of Eugene Weeden for his scrapbooks, of the Reverend Stephen Webb and the Reverend James Potter for their historical sermons, and of the Andover-Newton Theological School for information regarding Nicholas Pike. To all others, clerks, secretaries and ministers who kept records of the church for future generations, we express our appreciation. A "thank you" is also due to those who gave printed information regarding the Methodist Church. Regrettably, for want of space and time, its equally memorable history is not included except peripherally as it affected the history of the Congregational Church.

We put on record our gratitude to the following:

Mrs. Phyllis Warnock, City Librarian;  
David G. Eastman, M.D. for advice and his personal contribution to this work;  
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Dr. Donald C. Babcock, now of Seattle, Washington, for granting the use of his poem, Bersom Hill; and  
John Ballentine for information and advice.

Irene W. Wight

John E. Nelson



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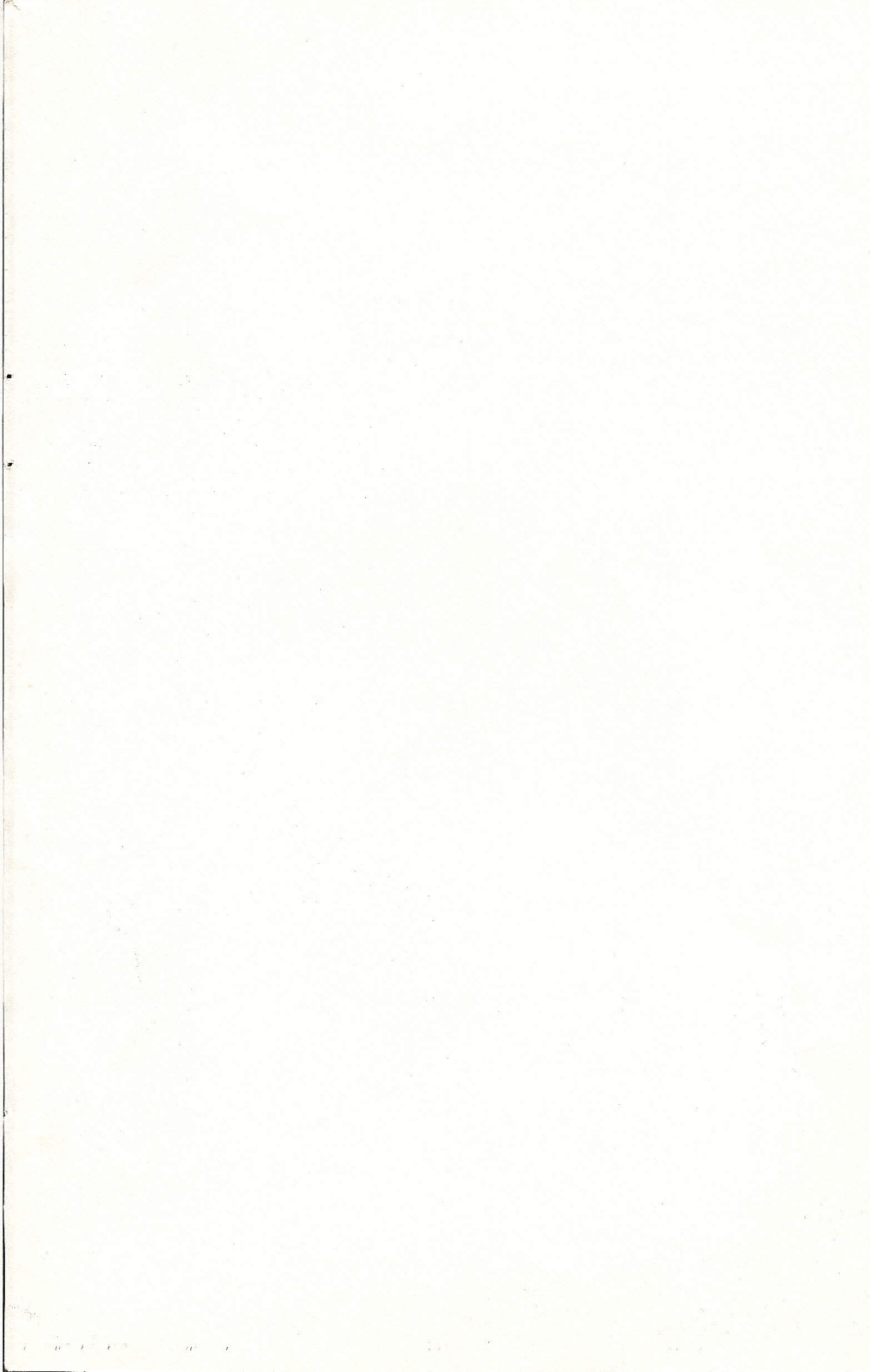
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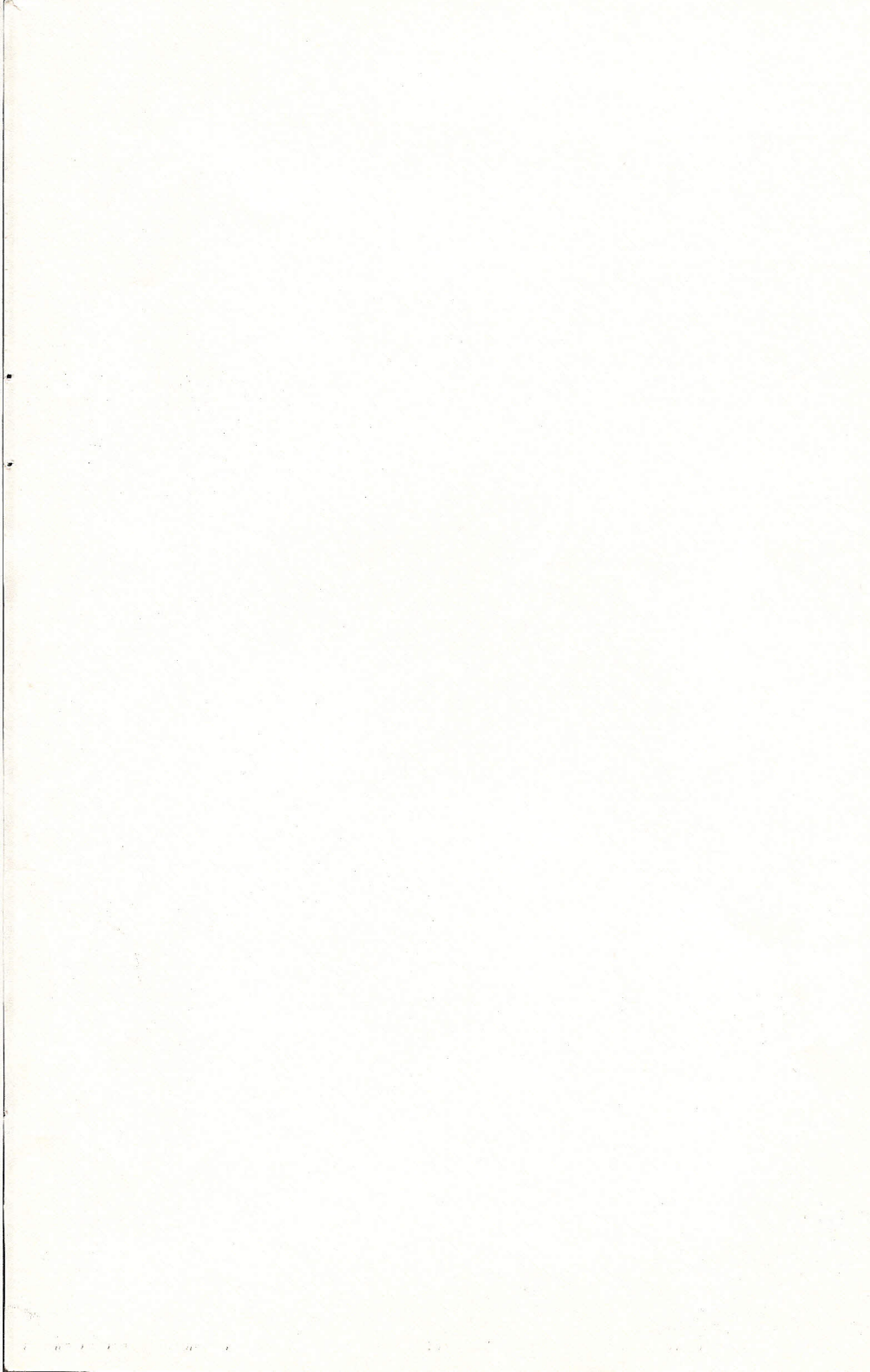
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**First Parish  
United Church of Christ  
(Congregational)  
Somersworth,  
New Hampshire**

**275<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
CELEBRATION**

**2004-2005**

A reprint of the  
250th Anniversary Booklet  
with additional history and pictures  
from 1979-2004.

First Parish  
United Church of Christ  
(Congregational)  
Somersworth,  
New Hampshire

125th ANNIVERSARY  
CELEBRATION

2004-2005

A reprint of the  
200th Anniversary Booklet  
with additional history and pictures  
from 1878-2004

## Notes on our Church's History

The oldest parish in New Hampshire began in 1633 in Dover in the area between the Bellamy and Salmon Falls Rivers at the head of the Piscataqua River. The First Parish Church of Dover was organized in 1638 at Dover Neck. Between 1675 and 1700, about eight miles farther up the peninsula, another settlement was started in the Rollinsford area but the residents attended church at Dover Neck, and later, after the church was moved three miles closer in 1713, at Pine Hill. Another settlement began at the falls on the Salmon Falls River and those residents also had to travel to Dover Neck (by land and boat across the Chocheco River) for services.

In 1727, a congregation was organized and meetings held (mostly in the Summer) in homes or out-of-doors in what is today Rollinsford. The services were led by the minister from Dover (Pine Hill) Church. Thus, the area became known as Summer Town, or Summer Heath, denoting its most frequented time. However, in 1729 the permanent residents of the Rollinsford-Salmon Falls area petitioned for and received from the General Assembly the establishment of a new parish, to be cut off from the northeast corner of the Dover Parish and to be known as Summersworth. (The spelling was later corrupted to Somersworth.) Thus, a newly built meetinghouse in what is now the Rollinsford Junction area became the Old Parish Church of Summersworth and the center of Town. Residents of the Salmon Falls River villages also became a part of the new parish.

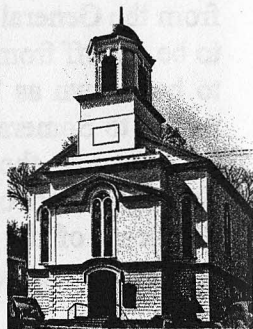
In 1729, the new meetinghouse was built, and was taken down in 1773. The second meetinghouse, erected in 1772, was destroyed by fire in 1779. The third meetinghouse

was erected in 1780, and stood until 1848, at which time it too was destroyed by fire. The second and third meetinghouses stood in the enclosure of what is now the Old Town Cemetery in Rollinsford Junction.

A new meetinghouse (the fourth) was built at Great Falls (as then named) in 1827, known as the First Congregational Church of Great Falls. The earlier members of the church at Great Falls had been meeting across the river, in Berwick, Maine, with the Pastor of the Rollinsford Church; until the Greek-revival edifice was built at High and Prospect Streets. This church grew rapidly as the old church at Rollinsford had been abandoned after 1827 and the center of the town's population shifted to the falls area.



In 1934 the Congregational Church became federated with the High Street Methodist Episcopal Church, meeting alternately in both churches. The High Street Methodist Episcopal Church had previously absorbed the Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church by the end of the 1800's. The federation continued until 1937, when it was voted to dissolve the Federated Church and to become the First Parish Church, Congregational, but occupying the former High Street Methodist Episcopal Church building. In 1961, the First Parish Church voted to become a member congregation of the United Church of Christ, and so changed it's name to read: First Parish United Church of Christ, (Congregational).



For a variety of reasons, the High Street building was sold in 1983, the decision being made two years previous to



seek out another location and to build a new church building that would better meet the needs of a changing congregation. The new church building on West High Street has been a focal point of our life together. Here we have gathered as a church family, as a worshipping community, as a witness for Christ in the City of Somersworth.



This short historical sketch would be incomplete without a mention of the saints who have gone before, and the saints who are here now preparing, believing, sacrificing, and loving so fully in preparation for the generations to come. It is the life and love of these many individuals who have lived out the prayer of our Savior, "...that they may all be one." (John 17:21)

May this community of faith called First Parish continue as a beacon of hope, that the world may see and hear of the steadfast love of the Creator, and that we may live together so as to express that love in our work and worship, inspiring the seeker to fullness of faith in Jesus, the Christ.



## The Years Since Our 250<sup>th</sup> Celebration

**1979** 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Summersworth Parish Church 1729-1979 was written by Irene Wentworth Wight, Church Historian, and the Rev. John E. Nelson, Pastor. It was awarded by the Congregational Christian Historical Society, Boston, MA, the Fagley Award (honoring Frederick L. Fagley, Founder of the Society). This booklet received First Place for churches under 500 members.

**1980** On January 6 there was a 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Worship Service, with a review of the various church threads that have been woven into the present day First Parish Church. Natalie Wheeler Ross has served as Treasurer for 15 years and is recognized at the Annual Meeting as she steps down from this position for health reasons. John Pay is nominated and serves through 1984. The Christian Education Building is demolished at an undetermined cost. The Christian Education Committee is celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Sunday School in the churches of the United States.

**1981** The church is the recipient of a bequest from the estate of Adelaide Willett (Died 3/21/75), from which interest only would be available to the church for unrestricted use. Prayers are asked for Rev. John E. Nelson, who is a patient at NE Deaconess Hospital. It is no surprise to the parish that at a special meeting of the church, a letter of resignation from Rev. John Nelson is read, and accepted with "deep regret and understanding," this to take effect on August 31<sup>st</sup>. Rev. Nelson preaches his last sermon on July 26, 1981. At this same April 5<sup>th</sup> meet-

ing, Mrs. Beryle Garneau resigns as Christian Education Assistant, a position that she held for 30 years, and through which she helped to shape the education programs of the parish. It is at this meeting that church building plans are presented, to be decided at a meeting on April 26<sup>th</sup>.

The special meeting of the church on April 26, seeks a decision to build a new church building on property the church owns on West High Street but the exact design and cost was still evolving. The vote is carried to build. A Search Committee is formed, with Cynthia Jutras as Chairperson. Mr. Graham Alvord, Licensed Lay Minister, begins as Interim Minister.

On June 7, at a special meeting of the church, the Rev. John Edward Nelson is named Minister Emeritus by unanimous vote of the parish gathered in meeting. It seems important to note the words used by Senior Deacon Phil O. Wentworth, Jr.:

“Twenty-five years ago, our Minister accepted a call to our (at that time) somewhat chaotic Parish. Under his direction and leadership our Church was put back on course and has proceeded continually forward. His outstanding dedication and service to several generations of our members, their families and friends, and his overall leadership together with his lovely wife, ‘Jo’, through the years has prompted us to recommend the following: We, the members of the Church Council, move that the title of MINISTER EMERITUS of the First Parish Church, Congregational, United Church of Christ, of Somersworth, NH, be conferred upon Reverend John E. Nelson. Effective, September 1, 1981.” Rev. Nelson remarked as follows: “It has been said that when a young minister received applause that’s Faith. When a minister receives applause in the middle of a long ministry that’s Hope. When a minister receives applause after a long ministry that’s Charity. We thank you for your charity and your kindness.”



In June, yet another resignation, that of Dorcas K. Hodsdon, as organist. Dorcas was born in Somersworth, the daughter of Charles & Alice (Hayes) Kinsman. A graduate of Somersworth High School, she went on to graduate from the Boston Conservatory of Music. Dorcas held organist positions within the Methodist Episcopal and Congregational Churches in Somersworth for well over 60 years, and had taught piano and organ for over 30 years. She requested that there be no fanfare on her leaving. It is important to note that in June, 1986, Mrs. Dorcas K. Hodsdon was named "Organist Emeritus."

A newspaper article in Foster's Daily Democrat on December 5 announces the church's intention to build and move to West High Street.

Jeffrey A. Mitchell is engaged to serve as Organist. He begins in September and at 19 years old, begins what would be a 20 year music ministry at First Parish Church. He also takes on the duties of Choir Director from Mrs. Bernice Stucker in September, 1982.

The Call of the Rev. Alexander Dreese was affirmed by vote of the church on December 20. Rev. Dreese was a graduate of Contoocook Valley High School, Peterborough, NH; Colgate University, Hamilton, NY in 1976 and Boston University School of Theology in 1978. He was ordained January 27, 1980 at Hillsboro, NH, and had served in pastoral ministry in Greenfield, NH. He came to a church looking for leadership to "make the move", and also a church seeking continued spiritual guidance to move forward as a church family.

**1982** This is the last meeting that Interim Minister, Mr. Graham Alvord, will lead, and he notes this is the 30<sup>th</sup> time he has served in an interim capacity! Mr. Alvord's vocation was in the area of school guidance work, more recently in the Portsmouth Schools.



Rev. Alexander Dreese and his wife, Rebecca (a graduate of Whittier College in California, with a degree in Philosophy and Religion) moved into the parsonage on Glenview Road. A highlight of the year's work is the October 31 groundbreaking for the new church building on West High Street, lead by Rev. Dreese.

**1983** Annual Meeting is held on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. A special meeting of the church was called for February 20<sup>th</sup>, to focus on Budget and Income Projections for 1983. It is noted that 80% of the yearly budget is covered by current pledging. A sad note for the First Parish Church Family, is the February 23<sup>rd</sup> passing of Minister Emeritus, Rev. John E. Nelson. Born May 31, 1919 in Newburyport, MA, the son of Oscar and Cassine (Brown) Nelson attended local schools and graduated from Florida Southern University in Lakeland, Florida. Ordained in 1951, Mr. Nelson served as minister of the Newington Town Church and Whittier Congregational Church in Island Falls, Maine. He was called to First Parish Church in 1956. Active in the community, Rev. Nelson had served as a Trustee of the Somersworth Public Library and educational advisory work and had been president of the Somersworth Rotary Club. In the New Hampshire Conference, Rev. Nelson had served on the Board of Directors, and as Chaplain and Moderator. Also, Moderator and member of the Executive Board of the Carroll-Strafford Association, he was a former president of the Boston Seaman's Friend Society (now Seafarer's Friend Society).

A joyous event for Rev. & Mrs. Dreese, the birth of twins, Mitchell and Annalisa, born May 12, 1983. At a special meeting on August 7<sup>th</sup>, there was discussion and action upon the current needs of the new church building project, now entering Phase III, the interior work. An early call for third year

pledges was requested to help meet the goal of being in the building by November. This must have worked, for the November 27 Dedication was held with great festivity and joy. Ending the year was the distribution of revised and updated By-laws, to be voted at the Annual Meeting in 1984.

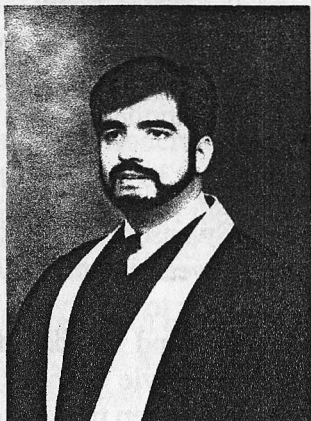
**1984** Prior to the Annual Meeting, a special church meeting was called for January 8<sup>th</sup>, to consider a new organ for the new church building. Al Loika, Chair, Prudential Committee gave an overview of rebuilding proposals of the organ by Berkshire Organ Company. It was decided to use a portion of the proceeds of the sale of the old church building to enter into a contract with Berkshire Organ Co., this plan to utilize old parts if possible, and to be in the best economic interest of the Church at this time. Annual Meeting, January 22, voted the revised By-laws, which saw the designation of Deacons and Deaconesses all under the heading of Diaconate, and all serving as Deacons. A new beginning! The July 8 church newsletter, initiated by Rev. Dreese, shares his resignation, effective on September 30. Rev. Dreese identified that the goals for his two and a half year ministry included "1. Facilitating a new building project for the church, 2. Increasing the vitality of our ministry and mission and 3.. Drawing new members into our church family." The expressed desire to move closer to their families in California would be enhanced by Rev. Dreese being called to the First Congregational Church of Ramona, California.

**1985** We find Rev. Robert O. Swanson as interim minister. Rev. Swanson's vocation was in teaching in the public schools. At this year's annual meeting (January 20) there are some adjustments to the By-laws, which end up being reviewed at this meeting, and will be acted upon at a special meeting on February 25. Beryle Garneau presents the church with the "Blue Book" to keep track of designated gifts and memorials to the church. The special meeting of February 25 saw the defeat of

these amendments, having to do with naming a Church Attorney and the function of a Temporary Trustee.

March 10, Mr. Mark A. Rideout preaches during morning worship. At a special meeting of the church following worship, it is voted to call him as pastor of the church. Charles Dufour is the Chair of the Search Committee. Mr. Rideout, his wife Kathleen and daughter, Katelyn, move into the parsonage in late June. He begins his ministry on July 1. Mr. Rideout is a graduate of North Reading High School (1974), North Reading, MA; Johnson & Wales College (1978), Providence, RI and Andover-Newton Theological School (1985), Newton Centre, MA. He is ordained by the Rockingham Association and installed by the Carroll-Strafford Association of the New Hampshire Conference in a service held on November 10, 1985. Church Historian, Ele Janetos notes that Mr. Rideout is the fifth to be ordained into the ministry at First Parish Church in its 256 years of history. He is the 37<sup>th</sup> minister since it's settlement in old Summersworth.

Rev. Mark A. Rideout,  
our 37th minister





Also in 1985, the pipe organ was installed the latter part of July, by the Berkshire Organ Company, West Springfield, MA at an original estimate of \$31,000. This was reduced by about \$6,000 as the company could use wood and pipes and other pieces from the original Estey Organ, circa 1880. With additions to the original agreement costing another \$5,100, the total cost of the organ was still around \$30,000. The proceeds from the sale of the grand piano given to the church by Rev. & Mrs. John Nelson, was placed in the Organ Fund. A hanging cross of polished brass was included in the woodwork of the organ cabinet, given in memory of Rev. John E. Nelson, and is a focal point of the sanctuary altar area. The cross was dedicated during worship on Palm Sunday, 1986. The addition of a new Baldwin Hamilton upright piano, given in memory of George Alexander Mitchell, was in place before Advent of this year. Mr. Mitchell was the father of organist/choir director, Mr. Jeffrey A. Mitchell. Hand crafted cabinets in the minister's office are by Fred & Priscilla Chellis, using leftover walnut pew wood.

**1986** The pipe organ was dedicated in a special service on April 27. Guest organist for this occasion was Mr. Melvin Tufts, who has served eight different churches as organist and choir director. A reception followed this very gala service.

On June 22, the new piano was dedicated to the greater glory of God, in loving memory of George Mitchell, and Mrs. Dorcas K. Hodsdon, never one to be "on stage" was recognized in her retirement as "Organist Emeritus" of First Parish Church. Mrs. Hodsdon was presented with an organ pipe from the old Estey Organ that was in the High Street Methodist Episcopal Church. On this was a brass plaque indicating the honor bestowed on this beloved disciple of the Lord.

The Pastor-Parish Relations Committee is established, and thus begins a new chapter in the communications between pastor and parish.

Ele Janetos crafts paraments in the four liturgical colors of white, red, purple and green.

Church growth is a focus during this year, as in November, NH Conference Minister, Rev. Robert Fiske, comes to lead discussion. Five wishes were brought forward:

1. Ecumenical Demographic study should be done
2. Growth in membership by 10%
3. Develop more church programming in the areas of Adult Fellowship, Adult Education, Family Nights, Youth programming
4. Concern about Sunday morning sports activities scheduling
5. Complete the addition of a steeple to our building.

A special church meeting on December 7, brought forward different sketches of steeples to be added to the building. A design was voted upon and the Prudential Committee authorized to move ahead on the project, and to raise the funds for same.

**1987** June 14 was the dedication of the new steeple and carillon. The steeple was possible by the gifts of many people. The carillon was a gift from Mrs. Margaret (Peg) Lanouette, in honor of her parents. The church hosts Rev. Michael Gray-Sloan, a Baptist minister/missionary from Nicaragua. The church hears a program on Bridges for Peace. September 24 the church received the resignation of Mrs. Jean Reed Latchaw, as Clerk



of the Church. Mrs. Latchaw had served in this capacity for 25 years, and is named "Clerk Emeritus." October 6, Organist Emeritus, Mrs. Dorcas K. Hodsdon entered life eternal, survived by 7 children, 20 grandchildren and 30 great-grandchildren, plus many students who remember taking lesson at the piano in her home on the corner of Noble and Grand Streets.

**1988** This year finds an effort to renovate and update nursery and kindergarten space in rooms off of the Church Hall. The pattern of using volunteer custodians is reviewed, and an outside custodial service is engaged. The Women's Fellowship generously support Rev. Rideout's pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He joins approximately 40 other NH Conference clergy and lay people on this 12 day visit.

**1989** Plans are underway to celebrate and mark the 260<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the roots of this church. Mr. Oliver F. Colburn, is named "Deacon Emeritus". A display of church records, Home Coming Worship, Special Speaker (Mr. Bob Whitehouse, local historian), catered dinner and organ recital are included in 1989-1990. There is also a special memorial service at the Carr Family Cemetery, Rollinsford, NH where Rev. James Pike, first pastor of this church is buried. The Christian Education Committee, working with local PTA's, hosts Mr. Jack Agati, a dynamic speaker and educator, who talks on birth order and how this effects family dynamics. The joint effort is an intentional way to share the resources of the church and community.

A Narrative Poem on the Occasion of the  
260th Anniversary of First Parish Church  
Somersworth, New Hampshire

"The Beginnings"

All along the way, We've journeyed hand in hand  
From place to place we've gone, To seek our promised land.

"At Dover Point"

They traveled through the forest, Across the river deep  
To places far from here, Worship there to keep.

"Summersworth"

A land wherein to live, To plant, to reap, to sow  
We've built and prospered greatly, With much for life to show.

"Great Falls Village"

With hearts yet strangely warmed, And people sternly wrought  
Two churches here have joined in faith, To share their common lot.

"First Parish Church"

A people here proclaim, Their faith in anthems strong  
To join with angels heavenward, Who sang creations song.

"We Worship God"

In water's flowing grace, The Holy Spirit's power!  
A table set for all, Communion's sacred hour.

"Pilgrims All"

And still we journey on, Pilgrims on our way,  
Remembering with joy our past, Look yet! A Brighter Day!

"Alleluia"

This is our journey's song, With hope we still proclaim:  
The love of God in Jesus Christ, From then to now the same!

by: Rev. Mark A. Rideout, Pastor



**1990** Since 1981, Rev. Alex Dreese had a small food pantry in the High Street Church building and brought this to the West High Street location. Rev. Rideout continued this outreach, but as requests increased, it made sense to expand the community involvement. In January, ecumenical partners in the communities of Somersworth, NH and Rollinsford, NH and Berwick, ME are invited to come and form a cooperative food pantry. Nine churches form the volunteer base, and eventually involve a base of volunteers and donations from the wider community. It is decided that First Parish, as it is handicapped accessible, will continue to host this outreach. The pantry eventually becomes a non-profit corporation in New Hampshire, as well as a registered charitable organization in Maine. It adopts the name, "The Community Food Pantry, Inc."

At the Annual Meeting, January 21, Rev. Rideout introduced a motion:

"I move that First Parish United Church of Christ, Congregational, Somersworth, NH, for consecrated service as Warden, Treasurer and Deacon, recognizes Oliver F. Colburn as a Life Deacon of this church, with all the rights and privileges which such a distinction bestows—and for consecrated service as Clerk of this church for over twenty-five years, recognizes Jean Reed Latchaw as Clerk Emeritus of this church, with all the rights and privileges which such a distinction bestows, during this, the 260<sup>th</sup> year of continuous ministry and mission in the name of God, to whom be blessing and honor, glory and power forever. AMEN." This motion was carried unanimously.

The "Mile of Pennies" is initiated, with proceeds going into the General Fund. As part of the 260<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there is an organ concert by Dr. Max Miller, of the Boston University School of Music.

**1991** The minutes of the previous year's annual meeting are now regularly included in the Annual Reports. The Annual Reports are now sent out in advance of the Annual Meeting. A vote of thanks on behalf of the church family is made to Lewis & Ele Janetos, for the gift of handcrafted communion cup holders. Now there are three to a pew! Also, to Mark & Bernice Taylor for the calligraphy 260<sup>th</sup> Anniversary poem, and Roll of Ministers. These now hang in the Library area of the church building. Rev. Rideout coordinates worship for the NH Conference Annual Meeting held at Keene, NH. The Parish Potpourri Cookbook, coordinated by Sherie Dinger and Karen MacRae makes its debut.

**1992** The Christian Education Committee initiated a "Secret Pal", as an effort to connect the Sunday School children with an adult. This ran through the year, with a spring-time "revealing" of pals. A Memorial Garden was dedicated on June 14<sup>th</sup>. Memorial contributions were made to an outside planting fund, and plant sales were coordinated by Mary Brundage to provide for specific memorial plantings. Stone engraving of the cross and "In Memoriam" was a gift of the Memorial Fund. The Heifer International Alternative Christmas Fair was once again held. During the year, the parking lot was expanded with an additional 25 spaces as the result. Clay Oelkuct did much of the preparatory work on this project.

**1993** Different programs are implemented by the Christian Education Committee: Acolyte Retreat, Early Devotion & Discussion, Communion Education. There will follow retreats for Sunday Schoolers, on Worship and Prayer as well.

**1994** Beryle Garneau is recognized for her forty years of work in making the Church Library an up to date, functional area of our shared life. After two break-ins, locks are changed, and added on all interior doors, with all roll-out win-

dows now having chains attached as preventative measures. The Love Offering is initiated, to support local community outreach.

**1995** Beyond Today all church planning process invites response and involvement to help enhance, change and move forward our ministry and mission.

**1996** The New Century Hymnal, the hymnal of the United Church of Christ, was now available. The burning of the mortgage on the West High Street building took place during the Annual Meeting. Recognition of Nancy Ainsworth, 10 years Treasurer; Jeff Mitchell, 15 years Organist/Choir Director; Betty Foley, 20 years Assistant Treasurer and Beryle Garneau, 35 years Memorial Committee.

**1997** Annual Meeting votes to become a Teaching Parish Church in the Field Education Program of Andover-Newton Theological School. Pastor Rideout supported in attending a class in supervision to be held at the Seminary each week, for the school year. Mrs. Lea Ann Tung, as Student In-Care of the Carroll-Strafford Association, was "taken on" as a Field Education Student for the school year. Rev. Rideout will be her Field Education Supervisor. A Teaching Parish Committee (Dee Drake, Debbie Hall, Jeff Mitchell) is formed. Spaghetti Suppers are initiated by Dave & Chris Stolpe, as an ongoing fundraiser and time of fellowship. An every member canvass is held in the Fall, with a wonderful result of visitors asking for input around four questions:

1. What does First Parish need to do in order to grow?
2. What one program would you like to see initiated and how would you support this program?
3. What aspect of church life would you change and how would you help with this change?

4. In what way can the church help you be a better disciple of Jesus Christ?

There is a Living nativity, outside, with LIVE animals (and it was COLD!).

**1998** It was voted to become a UKAMA Partner church through the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe. We are assigned the Tanganda Circuit as our partner. Rev. Lynn Rainsley begins in October, as part-time Christian Education Coordinator.

**1999** A new church addition is proposed. A Building Committee is formed, with Priscilla Chellis, Chairperson. Committee will work with architect, Mr. Phil Kendrick of Dover, NH. A Building Fund Drive Committee is to be gathered. The church votes to donate \$15,000 to the NH Conference Bicentennial Fund, to be paid over a three year period. Schematic drawings and visuals are prepared and shared with the congregation at meetings following Sunday worship. This addition will include dedicated Sunday School rooms, two handicapped bathrooms, elevator, office spaces, copy machine room, library space and a chapel/multipurpose meeting area. This is presented as "walk in" ready. Groundbreaking takes place later than anticipated, and work is done into December, then placed on hold until the weather permits.

**2000** Rev. Lynn Rainsley resigns to pursue a call as a pastor in another church in the NH Conference of the United Church of Christ. At the 270<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, it is proposed to call a part-time Associate Pastor, to work in particular with the Sunday School and Youth. Mrs. Lea Ann Tung, formerly a student minister through the Field Education Program at Andover-Newton Theological School, is interested in this work. The church wants to continue the work of the CE Coordinator,



and as Mrs. Tung seeks ordination, the church frames this in an official call, so that Lea Ann can pursue the ordination process through the Carroll-Strafford Association. Lea Ann initiates the Choir Chimes (which Bethany Tung directs), and a Children's Choir. Work continues on the building addition, which moves along. Building dedication takes place on Sunday, October 15 with a festive worship service, moving time of dedication in the addition itself, and a bountiful pot-luck luncheon following.

November brings to the Church Council, the resignation of Mr. Jeffrey A. Mitchell, as Organist/Choir Director. Jeff's music ministry spans close to 20 years. Easter Sunday, April 15, 2001 will be his last Sunday. Jeff's spirit and personality, as well as his skill, will be hard to replace. A Musician Search Committee is formed, and begins collecting information, updating job descriptions, and lining up substitute musicians

A special meeting of the congregation is called on December 3, to hear the recommendation of the Hymnal Committee. The committee had looked at close to 20 different hymnals, narrowed it down to three and really looked closely at each one. It is voted to use the Chalice Hymnal. This hymnal comes out of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and seems to represent our worship style, and would challenge us as well.

**2001** Lea Ann Tung is ordained in April, at her home church, First Parish Church, Dover, NH. Chalice Hymnals are dedicated in a worship service of singing and praise. Rev. Rideout serves as a delegate to the 23<sup>rd</sup> General Synod of the United Church of Christ. Ms. Erin Horion is engaged as the Organist/Choir Director and begins in August. Erin continues until April, 2002. It is important to note that the Music Committee develops a list of Substitute Musicians that helps encourage the taking of regular time off by those in music ministry. First Parish is blessed by the "in-between" music ministry of many substitutes, especially, Mrs. Linda Leonard and Mrs. Sylvia Dowst. The New Hampshire Conference celebrates its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

**2002** At a special meeting of the church on April 7, financial concerns dominate. With the building addition comes added expenses. The Church Family does grow, but income is not meeting present need to maintain status quo. Communicating the concerns is important, and a letter is sent to all church families. Many questions raised as to the best way to address the concerns. Budget is modified. The oldest living and longest member of the church, Oliver F. Colburn, Deacon Emeritus, enters life eternal. We also lose former Christian Education Assistant, Mrs. Beryle Garneau to God's rest.

**2003** Nancy Ainsworth resigns as Treasurer and Fred Chellis is voted in. Nancy is recognized with a gift of yellow roses, and an engraved music box for her years of service. Clerk Emeritus, Mrs. Jean Reed Latchaw, enters life eternal. Rev. Rideout serves as a delegate to the 24<sup>th</sup> General Synod. Mrs. Christine Stolpe is engaged as Church Musician, with responsibilities for Sunday Worship and Adult Choir. Chris eventually develops a Contemporary Choir, which brings a different "beat" to Morning Worship. Due to health, Rev. Lea Ann Tung resigns as Associate Pastor in November.

**2004** We participate in a survey entitled, Worshipping Into God's Future, coordinated by the Worship & Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries and Research Services of the Office of General Ministries of the United Church of Christ. This came out of a General Synod 24 resolution calling for discussion of the worship life of the UCC. Clergy, Church Musicians and Laity all played a part. We formed a 275<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee, and thanked Eric Chellis for his continued work on our updated sound system. At a special church meeting, we consider the request of the Indonesian Christian Fellowship, to use worship, Sunday School and fellowship space here at First Parish. After much discussion, a motion to not pursue this is carried. Two volumes of records,

from the formation of the Parish in 1729 come to light, and copies are available for review. Our excitement that these records, thought to have been lost, are now in the possession of the City of Somersworth. Our income and expenses are watched carefully and as the end of the year approached, we found ourselves "in the black" for the first time in many years.



Thanks to the 275th Anniversary Committee (especially Pastor Mark) for compiling the 25 years of history from memory and the various church record books.

Rev. Mark A. Rideout  
Mrs. Linda Breden  
Mr. Fred F. Chellis  
Mrs. Priscilla R. Chellis  
Mr. Jeffrey A. Mitchell  
Mr. Phil O. Wentworth, Jr.

Booklet Prepared By  
Priscilla R. Chellis  
Berwick Maine  
January 2005

